

Employee branding: A mixed method study for implementing an employee branding model in practice

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<p>Employees are the company's most important asset for differentiation and creation of a connection with other stakeholders. They offer companies the largest opportunity for growth in today's globalized and digitalized world that demands individualization, authenticity, and purpose.</p> <p>The growing number of brand touchpoints between employees and consumers, increased demand of quality with regards to interactions, the consumers criticality of advertising, and the expectation of a coherent brand experience have highlighted the power of authentic human-to-human interactions for businesses. Employee branding enables value creation not only for companies, but also for customers and the employees themselves. It creates the means for businesses to create a clear and structured plan to influence the hearts and minds of the individuals and provide them the tools to project the company's values in their own authentic way.</p> <p>The objective of this study is to create an employee branding model for a case company. The study starts by forming a theoretical framework around the definition of the concept of employee branding and related theories. The research focuses on determining the case company's present state in order to develop a relevant employee branding model. The research is carried out using abductive mixed method research design and by applying action research strategy. The data collection is compiled from the author's own experience in the case company, by observation, by quantitative questionnaire, and by qualitative in-depth interviews.</p> <p>The case company's present state was found to be inadequate for direct employee branding implementation. However, the study identifies the case company's key development areas by comparing the present state analysis to the developed theoretical framework. The study also produces a clear development plan and a roadmap to implement an employee branding model for the case company in addition to starting work on its implementation. It also provides extensive development to the case company's comprehension of the subject and its possibilities to improve the case company's business operations.</p> <p>The future development ideas for the case company include recommendations in order to extend the implemented employee branding methods and their effects. In addition, the study and its comprehensive theoretical background provides the necessary theoretical framework and guidelines for its implementation for other organizations.</p>	
Keywords Employee branding, employee advocacy, brand image, employee engagement	

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<p>Työntekijät ovat yrityksen tärkein voimavara, kun halutaan erottautua kilpailijoista ja luoda merkityksellinen yhteys muihin sidosryhmiin. Tämän päivän globalisoitunut ja digitalisoitunut ympäristö vaatii tarkoituksenmukaista, yksilöityä ja aitoa vuorovaikutusta. Yritysten työntekijät ovat avainasemassa tämän mahdollistamiseksi.</p> <p>Inhimillisen, aidon ja rehellisen vuorovaikutuksen merkitys yrityksille on kasvanut viime vuosina. Tähän on vaikuttanut työntekijöiden ja asiakkaiden lisääntynyt keskinäinen viestintä ja viestinnän kanavat, kasvavat vaatimukset vuorovaikutuksen laadukkuudesta, kuluttajien kriittisyys mainontaa kohtaan, sekä sidosryhmien lisääntynyt odotus johdonmukaisesta brändikokemuksesta. Työntekijäbrändäys mahdollistaa hyödyn tuottamisen niin yritykselle, asiakkaille kuin myös työntekijöille. Sen avulla yritys pystyy luomaan tarvittavan ympäristön ja raamit, jotta työntekijät pystyvät sisäistämään brändin ytimen ja ilmaista sen omalla yksilöllisellä tavalla muille.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on luoda toimiva työntekijäbrändi toimeksiantajan käyttöön. Opinnäytetyö alkaa teoriaosuudella, jonka avulla määritellään työntekijäbrändi sekä siihen vahvasti liittyvät teoriat ja käsitteet. Toimeksiantajan valmius työntekijäbrändäyksen mallin käyttöönottamiselle selvitetään opinnäytetyön tutkimusosuudessa, joka koostuu toimeksiantajan nykytilan määrittämisestä. Tutkimusmenetelminä on käytetty sekä määrällistä että laadullista tutkimusta. Tiedonkeruumenetelminä toimii tekijän oma työkokemus toimeksiantajalla, havainnointi, kvantitatiivinen kysely, sekä kvalitatiivinen syvähaastattelu.</p> <p>Toimeksiantajan nykytila havaittiin olevan riittämätön kehitetyn työntekijäbrändimallin suoralle käyttöönotolle. Toimeksiantajan nykytilan analysointi ja kehitetty teoriakehitys mahdollistivat kehityssuunnitelman muodostamisen toimeksiantajan työntekijäbrändin käyttöönotolle. Kehityssuunnitelma aloitettiin opinnäytetyön aikana. Tämän lisäksi opinnäytetyö kehitti toimeksiantajan ymmärrystä ja tietotaitoa työntekijäbrändyksestä merkittävästi.</p> <p>Suosittelut jatkokehitysideat sisältävät toimeksiantajan käyttöönotetun työntekijäbrändäysmallin jatkokehityksen. Tämä opinnäytetyö, ja sen teoreettinen viitekehys tarjoavat kattavat työkalut työntekijäbrändäyksen kehittämiseksi ja käyttöönottamiseksi myös muihin yrityksiin.</p>	
Avainsanat Työntekijäbrändi, brändilähettiläs, brändi-imago, sitoutuneisuus	

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Abbreviations

EVP	Employee value proposition
HRM	Human resource management
IBM	Internal brand management
KPI	Key performance indicator
TFL	Transformational leadership style
TRL	Transactional leadership style

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Today's global world offers more ways of creating brand awareness and connectivity than ever before. It also forces brands to search for more unique and compelling ways of differentiation. Personality, identity, humanization, transparency, and purpose. These concepts have stimulated discussion among marketers, consultants and business leaders during the recent years in order for the businesses to stand out and create connections with stakeholders.

"People don't buy from logos, they buy from people. People trust people" (Gil 2020, 5). Authentic human-to-human interaction creates the most compelling connection between people. It enables personality and identification and creates trustworthiness. It moves us and provides us purpose. From a company's perspective, employees and their essential role in delivering the differentiative aspects has become the focal point.

As the organizational borders have become blurred through a new, flexible workforce, the need to separate internal and external stakeholders has diminished which has highlighted the importance of a wider system of relationships (Fill 2013, 386-387). Together with digitalization and a growing number and diversity of each person's touchpoints with their peers, the importance of employees as the main source of delivering a brand promise has increased. Ind (2017, 14) describes this shift of focus also being related to:

- Increasing importance of service sector and services within other sectors
- Increased demand of quality with regards to interactions with consumers
- More mature consumers who expect coherent brand experiences and are more critical of advertising
- Growing number of brand touchpoints between employees and consumers due to megatrends such as digitalization and individualization

To attract and retain the right people to deliver the brand promise has created a war for talent. It shifted companies and organizations to concentrate on employees by providing more stimulating environments and taking care of their wellbeing both in and outside of work. Among other employee-related concepts, it evoked the need for employer branding. However, employer branding, as well as many other branding efforts of a similar nature, has faced the same challenge of becoming a portrait of a rather one-sided image which can easily turn into just another way of advertising a company.

Authentic human-to-human interactions require companies to start from the inside out. It's about bringing the brand behind the employees instead of aligning employees behind the brand (Ind 2017, 67). It redefines the employees as the company's number one customer

by focusing on employee identification and engagement in order to create value. A concept of employee branding starts from the inside out: from the employees. It can turn the employees into advocates who project the desired brand image to other stakeholders, their social networks, and peers which can expand brand desire and image substantially.

When creating a clear and structured plan and getting into the hearts and minds of the individuals by providing them the tools to project the company's values in their own authentic way, employee branding can create value for the company, its customers, and the employees themselves. In essence, a carefully implemented employee branding model can create substantial differential power for businesses and an authentic connection with the stakeholders. According to Brito (2018, 11), "Employee advocacy is a company's biggest opportunity for growth".

1.2 The main objective and research questions

This study's main objective is to implement an effective employee branding model for the case company.

The main research question is:

- How to implement an effective employee branding model for the case company?

The sub research questions are:

- What are the key concepts and existing theories behind employee branding?
- What is the case company's current status for implementing employee branding?
- What are the key factors for implementing employee branding successfully?

The author has been working in the case company since 2013 in managerial positions and therefore has gained knowledge of the organization's current situation. The study's initial assumption is that the case company's current situation does not allow a direct implementation of an organization-wide employee branding model. However, this study will provide an essential foundation and take steps towards the goal of implementing an effective employee branding model for the case company. It also develops the case company's knowledge and understanding of brand management and its benefits as well as produces essential information on the company's present state from the perspective of branding.

In addition to the study's main objective, the author has his own personal interest to grow to become an expert within the concept of employee branding. The author's personal belief is that all actions, whether business or personal, should start from the inside out and be as authentic as possible in order to get the best possible outcome. The concept of

employee branding enhances this belief and provides the possibility to further examine the vast opportunities and benefits it offers to companies.

1.3 The case company

The case company of this study is a small Finnish family owned business that manufactures and supplies specialty door hardware in the construction industry. The core product is sliding- and folding door systems for residential, commercial, and industrial needs which the company has been delivering successfully for over 35 years.

The company's main market is in Finland. It accounts for over half of the company's revenue. The market position and brand awareness in Finland can be considered to be high due to the company's long history and wide distribution and partner network. The export business leans tightly towards the EU community trade with several distributors and project clients in Asia, the Middle East, and the Pacific.

The company has its office and warehouse premises in Helsinki, where it currently employs twelve persons. The office personnel consists of eight employees who work with managerial, administrative, marketing, and sales tasks. The rest of the employees work with warehouse and assembly related tasks. In addition to the Helsinki location, the case company has a partially owned company in Northern Spain that functions as the manufacturer for a large majority of the products. The Spanish business partner employs four persons who work in the areas of manufacturing and research and development.

The author has been working in the company since 2013 in managerial positions. During that time, the family owned company has gone through a change of generation. Its impact to the company's culture, leadership style, personnel, and day to day operations has been significant. Due to the developments of the recent years, the role of the employees has been emphasised and it has become more and more central to the company's success.

The company's participative and customer-oriented culture that relies on the employees has been noted to provide a true competitive advantage in the increasingly competitive market. To highlight the employees' position and to create aligned brand managerial practices and structure, the idea to develop an employee branding model was introduced by the author. Its possibility to provide benefits not only for the company but also for the employees was seen as a great opportunity to enhance the company's culture and position in the market.

1.4 Research limitations

Branding is a large concept that influences all of the organization's stakeholders. Even though it is typically explained and understood in the context of marketing, branding covers every aspect of the business operations as its purpose is to create a distinctive and positive impression that will cultivate a lasting relationship with the target customer (Gronlund 2013, 14-15).

The research perspective of this study focuses specifically on the concept of employee branding. Therefore, the study's research is limited to the concepts of branding and employee management theories which either interact with or are critical to the understanding and development of an effective employee branding process. The fundamental research of related concepts such as human behaviour and corporate culture is limited and covers only the essential ideas behind employee branding.

2 Methods and research strategy

2.1 Theory development and methodological choice

The study's approach to the theory development is abductive. Abductive theory development approach starts with an observation of a conclusion rather than a premise. The conclusion is backed up with a determined premise that provides sufficient or nearly sufficient explanation which in return creates the reason to believe that the conclusion is true. (Saunders, Lewis & Tornhill 2019, 152) The study's abductive theory development approach enhances the chosen research strategy and topic. The theory's development starts from the observation of the theory behind employee branding which is then backed up through other theoretical models in order to provide sufficient reasoning for the conclusion to be true.

The methodological choice of the study is mixed methods research design. The mixed methods research integrates qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques and analytics. It is often related to philosophical positions such as pragmatism and critical realism. The research approach is a pluralist view where the researcher believes in the flexibility of the selection and use of the quantitative and qualitative method. The quantitative and qualitative research can be combined in a concurrent mixed method. "Concurrent mixed methods research involves the separate use of quantitative and qualitative methods within a single phase of data collection and analysis" (Saunders etc. 2019, 182). It enables richer data in shorter time than mono methods design. (Saunders etc. 2019, 181-182)

"Quantitative research examines relationships between variables, which are measured numerically and analysed using a range of statistical and graphical techniques" (Saunders etc. 2019, 178). Qualitative research, on the other hand, aims to study the meanings of participants and the relationships between them. The meanings themselves can have multiple interpretations and include unclear messages which in return demands physical as well as cognitive access to the participants and their data. (Saunders etc. 2019, 179)

The mixed methods research design was selected for the study due to its ability to enrich and widen the understanding of the collected data. The combination of qualitative in-depth interviews and a company-wide quantitative questionnaire and observational data allows the assessment of the organizational situation that combines interpretations on employee's behaviour and subjective experiences to be more reliable. The author's close relationship to the case company and its employees highlighted the importance of mixed methods research in order to reduce potential bias.

2.2 Research strategy

The chosen research strategy for this study is action research. Action research is a process that is designed to develop solutions to real organizational problems. The determined organizational problems are solved through a participative and collaborative approach that uses different forms of knowledge. Its purpose is to promote organizational learning and produce outcomes which have implications to the participants and organization even after the research project. The outcomes are produced through identifying issues, planning actions, taking action, and evaluating action. (Saunders etc. 2019, 201-202)

The process of action research is both emergent and iterative, and therefore the outcomes are developed through several stages. These stages or cycles are taken to enable action planning and decisions about the actions themselves. Its intention is to provide direction and focus on multiple stages so that the solutions for organizational issues would be explored and evaluated and change within the organization could be promoted. (Saunders etc. 2019, 203)

This study's purpose is to change organizational behaviour through participation which makes action research the most suitable strategy. Action research strategy's process of multiple research cycles enables gradual organizational learning and interaction between the stakeholders. It promotes a holistic approach and a constant organizational improvement that can be developed, implemented, and evaluated beyond the study until the organizational problem is solved. The figure 1 visualizes the action research cycles of the study.

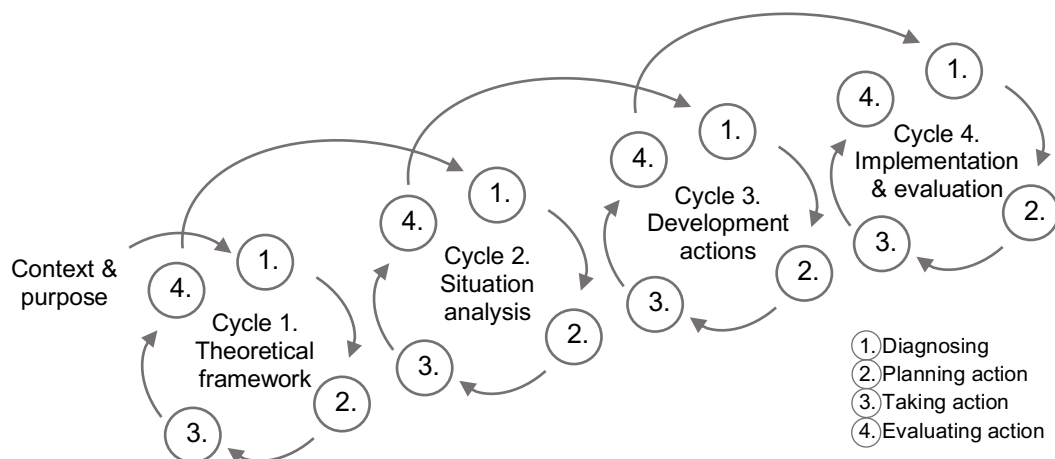


Figure 1. The research cycles according to action research model

An alternative research strategy for this study would be case study. Case study concentrates on the interaction of phenomenon and its context in an in-depth study. It

intends to identify what is happening and why, and to understand the effects of the situation and create implications for action. (Saunders 2019, 197) Even though case study shares similarities with action research strategy, the participatory and collaborative approach of the action research strategy better promotes the possibility to achieve the research objective that requires widespread organizational acceptance by its members.

2.3 Data collection methods

To gain access to data as an internal researcher can create issues. These issues may relate to the procurement of formal approval in order to conduct research in the organization or to the internal researcher's status in the organization. In particular, the researcher's status can create an issue in relation to cognitive access and even lead to ethical concerns within the participants. These issues can raise questions regarding the true intentions of the research and its possible implications to the participants and their status in the company. (Saunders etc. 2019, 239)

In order to lessen the possible negative impacts related to the author's position in the company and improve the study's reliability and validity, the study's data gathering methods were diversified. The diversification of the data gathering methods included observations, the author's own experience working in the case company, a quantitative company-wide questionnaire, and qualitative in-depth interviews of the employees and the CEO.

2.3.1 Data collection by observation

Observation as a research data collection method is especially useful when the research question and objectives are concerned with peoples' behaviours. It involves systematic viewing, reporting, description, analysis and interpretation on what people do and how they interact in a given setup. (Saunders etc. 2019, 378) The observation is carried out without taking an active part in it in a natural setting that allows the activity to be followed irrespectively of the author. The observation setting includes a pre-determined list of aspects on which to focus observation.

The observation was conducted by analysing the case company's brand appearance and brand communication through available internal and external literature as well as through the company's website and social media channels. The author's own experience of the case company was used to point out any consistencies or inconsistencies in the observed brand appearance and communication. In addition, the case company's internal communication system's usage was observed and analysed. Its purpose was to produce

further insight through quantitative data of the company's internal communication and employee behaviour.

2.3.2 Quantitative data collection

The selected quantitative data gathering method is multi-method quantitative study. It uses more than one quantitative data collection technique by, for example, collecting quantitative data using both questionnaires and structured observation and then analysing the data statistically. As quantitative questionnaire data is gathered in a standardised manner, the questions should be expressed clearly such that the participants can understand them the same way. (Saunders etc. 2019, 178)

The quantitative company-wide questionnaire was distributed to all of the employees of the case company, excluding the author itself. The purpose of the quantitative questionnaire was to gain a company-wide perspective of the case company's current situation. Its secondary purpose was to reinforce or establish contradictions against the knowledge and assumptions gained from the qualitative in-depth employee interviews. The questionnaire was made using Google Forms and shared to the employees by the case company's internal business platform (appendix 1). The questionnaire was kept open for responses during 14.4.-20.4.2020. Each responder was able to submit only one response.

The questionnaire included 21 questions that were categorized and answered on a scale. The categorization of questions was adapted from the theoretical part of the study and it was not made visible to the responders. The questions were formed to be as clear as possible. Preliminary communication regarding the questionnaire's purpose and functionality was made through the case company's internal communication platform. The questionnaire was planned such that it will take approximately 5 minutes to complete per responder. The questionnaire's response rate was high, accounting for 10 out of 11 possible responders (90%). The results were analysed statistically and formed into a graphic and a table to demonstrate the results (appendix 2).

2.3.3 Qualitative data collection

The selected method to collect qualitative research data was semi-structured. It involves techniques such as observations and semi-structured interviews and lead to the collection of non-standardized results which generally requires categorical classification. Once classified, the collected data is analysed through the use of conceptualization. (Saunders etc. 2019, 179-180)

The qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews of the employees and the CEO were conducted face to face, by phone, or by video call. In addition to the in-depth CEO interview, a total of four in-depth employee interviews were conducted which accounted for one third of the possible participants (40%). The participants have been kept anonymous by excluding the position and name from the study (except the CEO's position). Each of the interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards according to the question categories. The question categories were the same as those in the quantitative questionnaire in order to get insight on all of the necessary aspects (appendix 3). The duration of the interviews varied from 35 to 65 minutes.

The purpose of the discussion with the CEO was to gain access and essential contextual data of the case company's current situation. The individual in-depth interviews were held with directly employed staff of the case company. A preliminary communication regarding the interviews was given verbally in order to prepare the participants for the subject. The questions were not given beforehand in order to guarantee a more authentic reaction and discussion. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the case company's current situation and grounds for employee branding through the employee's perspective. The data was analysed qualitatively in order to get a picture of organizational issues related to the topic.

2.4 Research process

The timeline of the study is cross-sectional. Cross-sectional study describes a phenomenon or phenomena in a specific time, while longitudinal study has the capacity to study change and development over a longer period of time or series of specific times (Saunders etc. 2019, 212). Even though the longitudinal approach would provide further insight for the evaluation of the implementations in the study, the cross-sectional approach provides sufficient insight to deliver the research main objective when considering the time constraints involved in the study itself. The study's research process is presented in figure 2 from the research idea to the execution of the research.

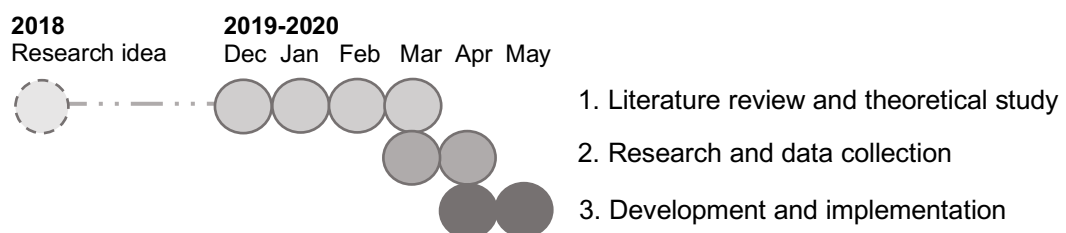


Figure 2. The study's research process

3 Employee branding

3.1 Concept of employee branding

Employee branding is aligning employee behaviour to deliver a consistent brand promise to external stakeholders by affecting how employees identify and are committed to the brand (Fill 2013, 386). Its objective is to apply all the different organizational systems to motivate employees to project the desired organizational brand image to other stakeholders (figure 3). To do so, employees need to internalize the desired image through consistent and credible organizational communication. (Miles & Mangold 2004, 68) Everett (2016) further highlights the importance of the strategic approach of employee branding on creating employee behaviour that is “on brand”. The desired brand image aims to strengthen the corporate brand with every communication, internally and externally, through the employee’s everyday work. (Everett 2016, 52)

As a concept, the purpose of employee branding is to highlight the importance of the employees as one of the most effective and capable marketing channels to manifest the brand. The objective is to make the employees feel valued and provide a sense of belonging, which is a basic human need. (Centaur Media USA Inc. 2006) In other words, it is a process in which the vision of the organization is transferred by the management onto the actions, behaviours, opinions, and mindsets of the employees inside and outside of work so that it will reflect a positive image of the organization to everyone else. This authentic and comprehensive interpretation of the organizational brand is often referred as “living the brand”. By combining these methods, employee branding extends its frontier from marketing purposes to sales, leadership communication, and human resource management with high importance on recruitment and selection processes. (McCann 2014, 144)

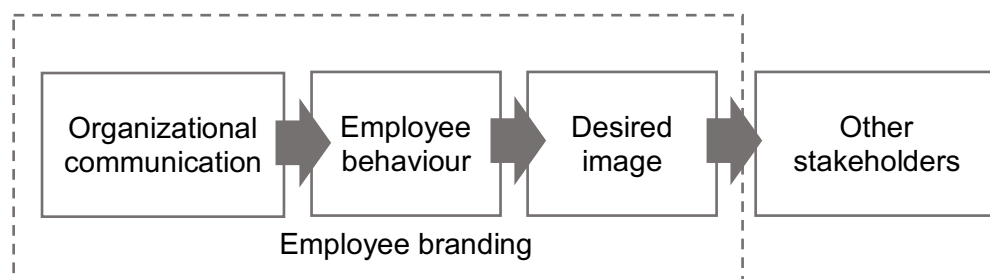


Figure 3. Employee branding: delivering the desired brand image through the employees

Brito (2018), in the other hand, addresses the concept of employee branding through the concept of employee advocacy. Advocates are natural endorsers of the brand. They include customers, partners and employees; people who are willing to publicly support the

organization, its products or services. Advocates are trusted by the target market and therefore their influence on prospects is significant through their positive experiences, reviews, feedbacks, referrals, and studies. (Brito 2018, 32-33)

An employee's social network includes a great number of people such as former colleagues, professional contacts, classmates, acquaintances with overlapping sets of skills with industries or professional interests, and friends and relatives. The personal networks and the possibilities to influence one another have further grown through the influence of social media. However, companies cannot influence an employee's peers without the help of the employee herself. (Brito 2018, 68) Therefore, Brito (2018) argues, that by mobilizing the employees to become brand storytellers, or in other words brand advocates, companies can grasp the biggest opportunity for growth in a world where the combination of constant connectedness and conversation has become standard (Brito 2018, 11).

Gil (2020) discusses in the book "The end of marketing; humanizing your brand in the age of social media and AI" the importance of humanizing the brand through employee advocacy. He argues, that consumers require genuine communication instead of mass communication. They want to be engaged and to feel as though they are part of a movement. This requires brands to make the customers feel valued by endorsing human aspects such as the need to be acknowledged, wanted, and loved. (Gil 2020, 3-4)

Gil (2020) argues, that in these times, where the true worth of being active in different social media platforms (i.e. impact to the revenues) is still ultimately accessed and evaluated only by social media providers, the most significant competitive advantage and asset for the brand are the employees. Employees should be counted as critical for brand storytelling and communication as they are for the general operations of the business. In the end, they are the face and voice of the brand. Employees have the power to speak on the company's behalf and sway public perception whether the company would like it to be so or not. Therefore, organizations should implement systems to help the employees effectively represent the brand. (Gil 2020, 128-129)

Employee advocacy creates shared value for multiple stakeholders. Brito's (2018) "Employee advocacy multistakeholder value model" (figure 4) describes the universal benefits of participation marketing by illustrating the flow of business value from the brand to the employees and customers and then back to the brand. The model starts from strategic planning and highlights the importance of internal collaboration from the beginning of the process in order to create real value for the employees. By enabling employees to be part of a larger conversation and empowering and motivating them to

create and share content they truly care for, the organization can actively create employee value. That in return creates happy employees that can transform into brand advocates who spread the brand story according to the brand vision to other stakeholders. In turn, the new advocates can create yet more advocates through the power of their social networks. (Brito 2018, 68-71)

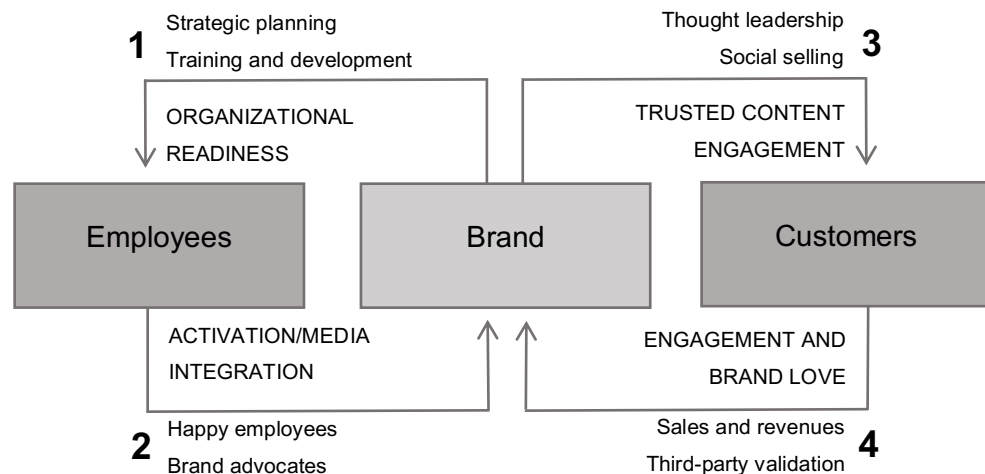


Figure 4. Employee advocacy multistakeholder value model (adapted from Brito 2018, 69)

The third step is delivering the brand message through thought leadership and conversation with customers. It's about delivering value to the customers and engaging them through trustworthy content by reactive and proactive means. Social selling is one example of a proactive means. In social selling, customers and prospects are provided value by offering educational material and answering questions (i.e. through social media) which in return can get the customers problem solved or enable them to make more informed purchase decisions. Brito (2018) argues that social selling is synonymous with employee advocacy as in both concepts' employees deliver value to the customer by interacting with them directly and proactively. As the customers becomes happier and more engaged with the brand, it returns brand value back to the organization which enables a positive increase in revenues. (Brito 2018, 68-71)

The strategic approach for the employee advocacy program begins from internal selling. Companies need to provide employees a reason to become employee advocates by creating the "why" (figure 5) and selling the value throughout the organization. The first step is getting the leadership and other key stakeholders on board. It requires convincing them of the multiple benefits (table 1) the employee advocacy program can offer for the brand. By showing that employees are already engaging organically without directions or guidelines given by the organization, whether the organization wants it or not, should further convince of the possibilities and effects that a more controlled and activated

workforce can have on the public. The “key stakeholder benefits” need to be introduced to each group separately to get their buy-in. Constant communication and a simplified platform with fresh content to see, use, create, and share will help to engage the employees and to develop mass-adoption. (Gil 2020, 129-134)

More social media post shares by employees lead to more digital impressions and websites visits, which ultimately results in more revenue and profit for the company.

Figure 5. Why employee advocacy program is important (adapted from Gil 2020, 135)

Terpening, Li & Littleton (2016) examines employee advocacy and its motivations in the report “Social media employee advocacy: tapping into the power of an engaged social workforce”. They claim that employee advocacy has existed in business since the beginning of branding but only in contemporary brands have they truly started to realize the power and scalability of their employee base. Brands needed first to understand what it means to be social for different departments in the organization and how to spread the brand message from brand pages alone to include employees’ personal pages in the process. (Terpening etc. 2016, 4-5)

Brand ambassadors, persons who are highly trained employee advocates in public relations department or in leadership positions, set the stage for scalable advocacy programs. Nevertheless, the company’s cautious actions with social media policies, for instance, discouraged the spreading of the brand advocacy program through employees and their networks. Now this has started to change as the number of drivers and dynamics has increased to speak on behalf of employee advocacy programs. (Terpening etc. 2016, 4-5) According to Terpening, Li & Littleton (2016, 5), such drivers are considered to be:

- Employees’ position as the most important asset for the companies
- Employee engagement
- Social shifts to paid platforms
- Availability of employee advocacy tools

Altimeter’s (a Prophet company) employee survey (Terpening etc. 2016, 15-16) shows that employee advocacy programs bring benefits for both the employee as well as for the brand. The survey counted 185 companies with staff larger than 250 employees in each company. It showed that the most important motivator for the employees to share information on their personal social media accounts was shared brand and employee benefit. It exceeded the separately listed employee benefits and brand benefits. The highest ranked motivator to share content was the belief in the employer’s mission and willingness to promote it. It strengthens the assumption that successful employee

advocacy programs should start with engaged employees. The survey also enhances the belief that employees see both brand and personal benefits in sharing content through their own social media accounts. (Terpening etc. 2016, 15-16) A list of other suggested employee and brand benefits and motivators from multiple sources are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Employee branding's suggested employee and brand benefits and motivators (adapted from Aldisert 2019; Brito 2018, 114; Everett 2016, 60; Gil 2020, 131-132; Ind 2017, 3; Terpening etc. 2016, 15)

Employee benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhances employees' career and influence on social networks - Makes the employee to be seen as a leader among the peers - Reward or recognition for sharing - Helps friends to understand better what the employee does - Employees values gets mirrored and voices heard - Helps employees to feel proud of working for the company - Helps employees to grow their own personal brand and career
Brand benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Builds brand desire and image among other stakeholders - Drives more brand awareness and grow digital share of voice (main KPI's for marketers) - Additional brand trust; people trust people more than brands - Access to employees' personal networks - Employees boosted loyalty - Defend the company during a crisis - Improved employee retention and way to attract top talent - Helps to recruit new employees - Improves internal branding and brand engagement - Improves communication by closing the gap between executive level and staff - Creates new connections between teams and individuals - Increased employee contribution to organizations intellectual capital - Deeper insight to the products / services and how the organization functions - Creates more valuable content - More innovation and better collaboration throughout the business - New venues with which to reach customers - Increased market value, PR and prestige - Direct impact on sales; more leads and sales opportunities - Increasing digital share of voice (SOC)
Shared benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Believing in employers' mission and willingness to promote what they do - Belief in the product and willingness to share the experience - Better connections with colleagues at work

Loose (2019) claims in the article “Why employees must approach employee branding with caution” that harmonizing employer brand and employee brand is different than the earlier adaptation of branding due to its personality. One of the most appealing aspects of employee branding for companies is to have a clear strategy and processes on how to develop and protect its brand image through its employees. Companies do not want to be associated with negative communication and personal beliefs such as hate speech, racism, or xenophobia that could damage their image. If such negative behaviour and word gets out to the public, it will have a negative impact on the company’s employer brand. Therefore, in terms of the company’s self-interest, such behaviour should be refused completely. (Loose, 2019)

However, according to Loose (2019), suppressing free speech, even for good reason, can create a culture that suppresses the flow of actions and ideas too. Suppressing speech and even bad ideas can be counterproductive and damaging to the employer brand. For example, an employee who has been let go after expressing personal beliefs on social media channels that the brand has considered to be damaging for its image can lead to an ex-employee’s horror story which has a huge impact on the company’s reputation and employee branding campaign. (Loose, 2019) Other challenges and good practices of employee branding are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Employee branding’s good practices and challenges (adapted from Centaur Media USA Inc 2006; Loose 2019)

Good practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Determine who should be in charge; crucial in order to implement and follow through the cultural and behavioural change - Communicate and involve from the start; the story and the background on how things are done here needs to start from the beginning of the employment - Do not talk about “brand communication”; needs to be included to everything that there is (i.e. through incentives, events off and on work, product launches etc.) - Monitoring success in internal branding; e.g. annual staff survey where key indicator is customer service assessment – how engaged are they with the staff
Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - War for talent and talent acquisition; recruiting the right people to begin with - Employee retention and engagement; making employees feel involved - Business scale and rapid growth; harder to increase employee engagement - Employees passion is not necessarily as strong as in the centre of the brand - Translating brand terminology to a story that everyone understands - Freedom of speech; suppressing speech, even for good reason can be counterproductive - Time to actually do it

3.2 Relationship to other branding concepts

Brands are organic entities that emerge and develop through multiple interactions and conversations between different stakeholders (Ind 2017, 3-4). Corporate communication creates a network of relationships between stakeholders such as employees, managers, and external stakeholders. The communications aim is to gain goodwill, involvement and understanding among all stakeholders. Sustainable long-term relationships require consistent communication where the delivery of the brand promise matches the generated expectations. (Fill 2013, 397)

In order for the organisation to live up to what is communicated, the organisation needs to be consistent and integrated with its own brand activities. Therefore, different brand concepts which occupy the same areas of branding, i.e. corporate brand, employer brand, and internal brand should be thought of as one and the same brand: the corporate brand. (Ind 2017, 6-8)

Corporate branding is the interaction of multiple stakeholders with the organization's brand. The traditional approach to corporate branding includes aspects such as advertising, sponsorship, product packaging and customer experience elements which highlight the non-human elements in resource allocation and branding strategies. However, the personality of the brand via person-to-person interactions creates the most valuable memory of the brand for the customers. This makes the brand's success highly dependable of the internal stakeholders' attitudes and behaviours in delivering the brand promise. (Everett 2016, 25-26)

The organizational borders have become blurred through the new flexible workforce (e.g. part time workers, consultants, outsourced workers and temporary workers) causing the line between internal and external stakeholder, or members and non-members, to be more indistinct. Organizations that do not realize this and isolate themselves from the surrounding environment by defining sharp boundaries on who they are and what they can be, are described to be egocentric organizations. Egocentric organizations do not give enough value to the wider system of relationships that they are part of and rather overestimate their own importance and identity. This affects the context to which they belong. Minimizing or even removing the boundaries between the different organizational members and non-members (e.g. customers, competitors, and suppliers) enables organizations to create new identities and use more effective internal marketing communications. (Fill 2013, 386-387)

The growth of online brand communities and the rapid change in multiple industries has given increased power to the customers and other external stakeholders. This has urged the need for organisations to recognize the brand interactions that the customers and other external stakeholders have independent of the organisation itself. (Ind 2017, 3-4)

The amount and diversity of touchpoints between employees and external stakeholders has increased substantially through different channels. Such channels include, for example, a corporate LinkedIn page or other social media platforms, a company's web site, job boards, personal and professional networks, employee and employer reviews and ratings online, as well as the evaluation of the perspective as a consumer. Organisations can't dictate employees and other stakeholders' behaviour in all channels and contexts. However, they can try to create an environment where employees have the means to rise to the occasion, think for themselves, and provide responses accordingly. (Ind 2017, 4-5)

Employees are a central part of corporate brand communication. They minimize the gap between how external stakeholders see the organization and how the organization wants to be seen. The corporate brand, identity, and values are translated to the employees through internal communication. Its goal is to align employee behaviour with corporate brand values and identity. This process is referred to as internal brand building. (Fill 2013, 387)

Internal branding focuses on the role of the employees in several contexts. It is still a developing field with divergent and fragmented conceptualizations that relate to concepts such as employer branding. Saleem & Iglesias (2016) provides a literature review on internal branding in their paper 'Mapping the domain of the fragmented field of internal branding'. They propose that internal branding "is a process through which brands aim to facilitate the internalization of brand values by the employees, so that employee behaviour aligns with the brand values when delivering the brand promise" (Saleem & Iglesias 2016, 44).

The purpose of internal branding is to create positive customer emotions towards the brand by impacting employees' emotions and attitudes. In essence, internal branding is a value creation chain from employees to customers (figure 6). (Saleem & Iglesias 2016, 43-44) It is an effort to make company-wide integration of brand ideologies, leadership, human and resource management, internal brand communication and internal brand communities where employees are central to co-creating brand value with multiple stakeholders (Saleem & Iglesias 2016, 50).

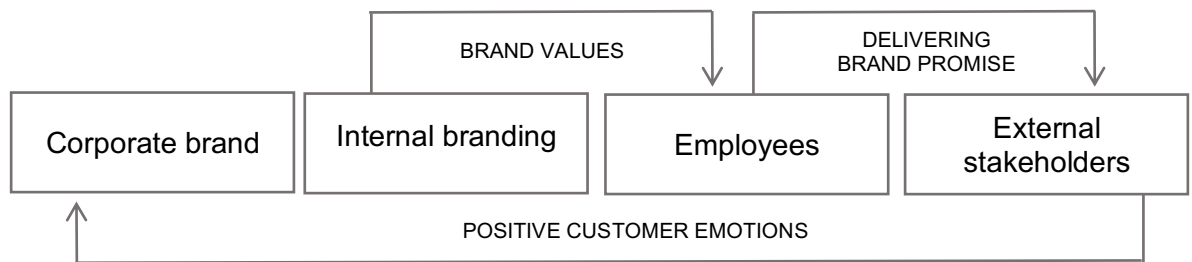


Figure 6. Internal branding process: value creation chain through employees to customers

Ind (2017) determines the components of internal branding to be brand ideology, brand leadership, brand-centred human resource management, internal brand communication, and internal brand communities (figure 7). Brand ideology is the starting point of internal branding. It consists of mission, vision, goals, culture, and shared values. Strong brand ideology guides leadership actions and choices as well as employee's behaviour and communication with other stakeholders for the best interest of the organization and its values. Brands with strong ideology are perceived as authentic and capable of generating strong identification and commitment with the stakeholders. (Ind 2017, 64-67)

Brand leadership requires a more empathetic, open, and humble style in order to bring the brand behind the employees instead of aligning employees behind the brand. This rather new type of participatory leadership style's purpose is to increase employee commitment, promote employee brand building behaviour and to reduce employee turnover. It also requires more active employees who no longer execute the corporate script passively. (Ind 2017, 67-69)

The purpose of brand-centred human resource management is to co-create positive brand value with external stakeholders as well as organizational practices and policies for potential and existing employees that creates positive brand value. The process starts from recruiting individuals whose values are congruent with the brand ideology. It continues with consistent employee training to enable employees to internalize brand ideology and include it as part of their specific job. Employee flexibility and freedom to choose what skills to develop and explore enhances the organic and co-created way of viewing the brand. Compensation policies and practices also play a central part in brand-centred human resource management. The organizations need to recognize and enhance talent that acts according to the brand ideology and enable their growth in order to create continuity for the desired behaviour. (Ind 2017, 69-70)

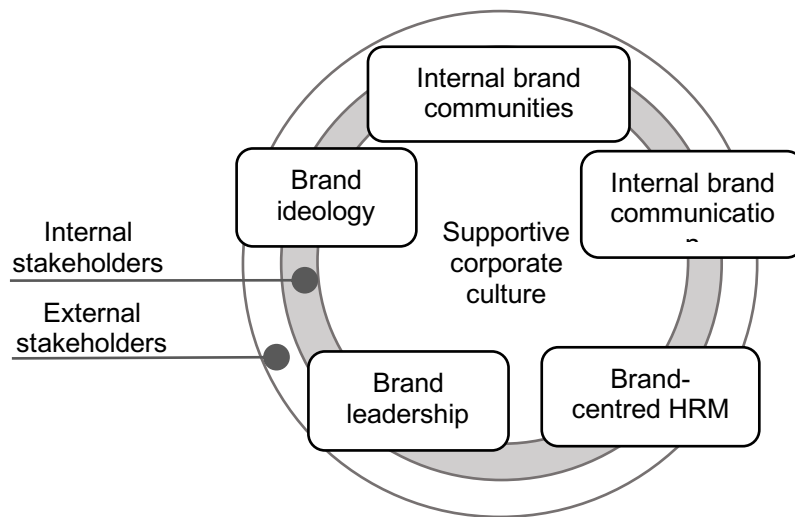


Figure 7. Internal branding components (adapted from Ind 2017, 65)

Internal brand communication is of high importance for the short- and long-term success in co-creating brand value. It can be divided into overarching areas that account for different degrees of communication through different platforms. These are informal and formal internal communication and informal and formal external communication. The information from external stakeholders can affect the identification of the employees with the brand the same way as information from the internal stakeholders. Misaligned internal and external communication can create confusion among the stakeholders and a contradicting image for the organization. Therefore, congruent internal brand communication is the key for successful implementation of internal branding. (Ind 2017, 70-72)

Brand communities are actively or passively created consumer communities who share values, beliefs, and interests with each other. Internal brand communities, on the other hand, consist of employees who work for the brand. As the boundaries between the stakeholders, or members and non-members, have been blurring internal brand communities can also be open for external stakeholders. The idea of mixing the internal and external communities is not easy as there are often organizational fears related to it. These include a belief that external stakeholders are incapable of bringing relevant contributions to the processes, the fear of the risk of sharing information with outsiders, and the possibility for the employees to feel threatened by a valuable contribution from an outsider. In spite of these assumptions, the external and internal brand community's close collaboration can create high value for the brand through new ideas and solutions. (Ind 2017, 72-73)

Internal branding also creates attitudinal outcomes where brand compliance represents the basic and more limited outcome and brand citizenship the highest-attitudinal outcome

(figure 8). The brand compliance is the employee's compliance to the internal branding process. It doesn't resonate with any specific additional behaviour. Brand identification, on the other hand, enables other desired outcomes such as positive brand behaviour and employee brand commitment which increases the employee's willingness to achieve brand goals (e.g. in customer service situations where the employee is willing to "go the extra mile"). Committed employees are also more empowered to resolve situations on their own initiative and share their learning and experiences with colleagues in order to develop and improve the organization. Brand citizenship is employee behaviour that goes beyond the organization's expectations. Such behaviour, even though difficult to achieve, has a positive effect on other employees and typically leads to the employee's referral of the brand to other social networks such as friends and family. (Ind 2017, 74-75)

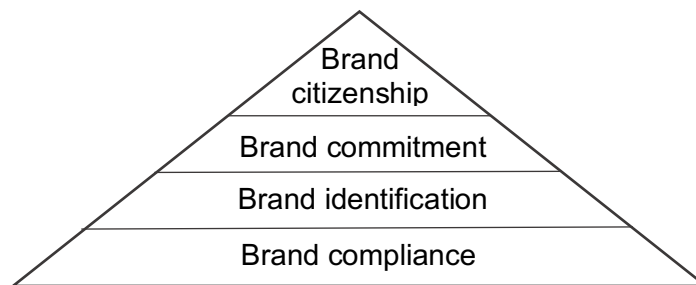


Figure 8. Internal branding's attitudinal and behavioural outcomes (adapted from Ind 2017, 75)

Everett (2016) determines employee branding's core element to be people's behaviour which is formed around how people feel about the organization. Employees create an emotional response before and during their employment and then project themselves and the organization to others in a particular way. The emotional response interlinks employee branding with employer branding as both of them are most powerfully projected by people; while employee branding is the process where employees internalize and project the corporate brand and its reputation and then communicates it to others, employer brand is the organization's reputation as an employer. (Everett 2016, 45-46)

Employer branding is one part of a wider range of systematically managed elements that affects brand experience and reputation. It can be described through the terms of perception and associations with the organization; what people hear about the organization and how they experience it. (Mosley 2014, 3-4) "Delivering on your employer brand promises requires an aligned and integrated approach to communication and people management" (Mosley 2014, 9).

The employer brands purpose is to attract, engage, and create retention for the best and most suitable talent by concentrating on tailoring the organization's offering to its

employees and people interested in working with it. The offering is conceptualized in the form of the Employee Value Proposition (EVP). EVP determines how the organization would like people to see it and therefore aims to provide a unique, relevant, and compelling package to the employees. (Ind 2017, 6-7)

While employer and internal brandings orientations are different (human resource management and brand management respectively) they can work together if their roles are clear inside the organisation. Employer branding concentrates on employee attraction and retention, while Internal branding is a process that aims to align employees behind the brand and to build brand identification and engagement among the employees so that they would be better off creating value for other stakeholders. (Ind 2017, 6-7) Figure 9 demonstrates the relationship between corporate brand, internal branding and employer- and employee branding together with people's behaviour.

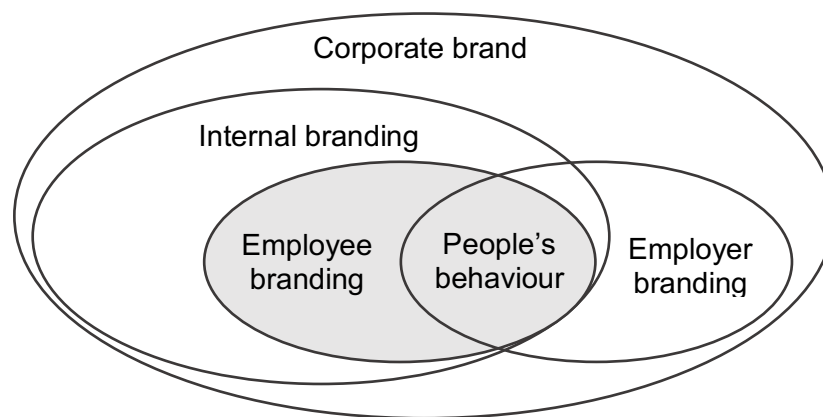


Figure 9. Relationship between concepts of branding and people's behaviour

3.3 The employee's emotional and intellectual buy-in

According to Miles & Mangold's (2004) proposal in the article "A conceptualization of the employee branding process", the messages that employees receive are interpreted by the mechanism within the employee's psyche. It's the psyche of the employees that makes sense of the organizational communication and creates or destroys employee engagement. Miles and Mangold determines it to be a psychological contract between the employee and the organization (figure 10). (Miles & Mangold 2004, 66)

The psychological contract is a series of expectations between the organization and the employees. Employees receive and interpret the organization's messages which set the expectations from the beginning of the first interaction with the organization until the end of the relationship. Realistic and consistent messages create positive outcomes whereas negative outcomes emerge if the employees feel that the psychological contract has been breached. (Miles & Mangold 2004, 79-80) Ind (2017) describes the psychological contract

as creating an environment where the employees have the flexibility to work the way they see fit. It also allows the employees to develop and grow as long as the organization is delivering on its side of the contract by creating the environment for the employees and facilitating the commitment process. (Ind 2017, 8)

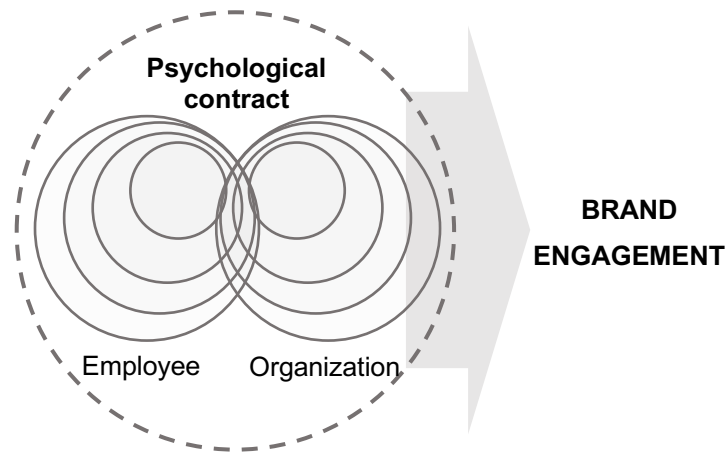


Figure 10. Psychological contract between employee and organization

The organization's ability to communicate values and goals that help the employees identify with the organization is the foundation of successful employee branding. The employee's identification with the organization depends of the coherence of the employee's own identity and values with the organizational identity and culture. The organization's strategic credibility as well as corporate vision, goals and strategy provide the employees information on where the company is heading and how achievable the objectives are. These aspects constitute the employee's emotional and intellectual buy-in (figure 11). (Fill 2013, 397-398)

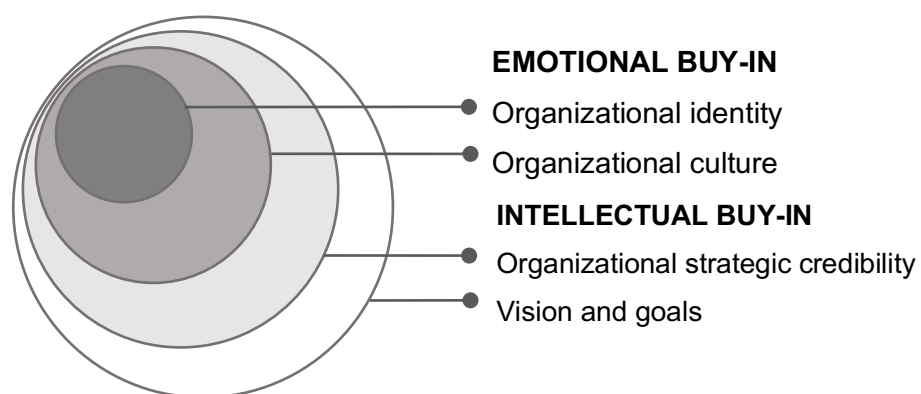


Figure 11. Employee's emotional and intellectual buy-in

Organizational identity is what individuals feel and think about the organization and how those beliefs are shared among its members. It's what individuals sees as important, unique, and distinctive about the organization and therefore requires three main decisions to be made by the organization: who they are, what their main business is, and what they

want to be. The stronger the link between the organizational and individual identity is, the stronger the organizational identity grows, which promotes a healthier organization that has better resources and capabilities to achieve its goals. Organizational identity is formed through the members of the organization, but it also reflects the feelings and beliefs of non-members of the organization. Variance between these beliefs and perceptions may cause confusion, misunderstandings, and conflicts. Individuals form positive and negative self-perception through the membership of the organization but also how other stakeholders see the organizational identity where the individual is associated. (Fill 2013, 392-393)

The organizational core identity can also be described through corporate brand perspective as the organization's core proposition (table 3). The core proposition combines the organization's statement of purpose and core values. The purpose is the organization's fundamental reason for existence while the core values set the guidelines and enduring principles for the organization to achieve its goals. A clear and compelling statement of purpose combines broad, fundamental, enduring, and inspiring guidelines. Purpose is often paired with the corporate statement of vision and mission, as such they end up sounding very similar to each other. This occurs even though a vision statement is typically defined with more tangible and measurable goals that can easily turn into generic definitions of future leadership. The core values, on the other hand, set the broad parameters for the formulation of the business strategy. It defines individual behaviour that shapes the organizational culture and the way the organization positions itself among stakeholders. (Mosley 2014, 24-27)

Table 3. Organizational core proposition: purpose- and core value statement

Organizational Core Proposition (identity)	
Purpose Statement	Core Value Statement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organizations reason for existence - Pairs with vision- and mission statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guidelines and enduring tenant to achieve the goals - Parameters for the formulation of business strategy

Organizational culture is formed by the collective beliefs and assumptions that the members of the organization have, making organizational identity the subset of organizational culture. It forms a unique environment that influences all members of the organization and sets up the norms, guidelines, and expected behaviours. It describes how things are carried out in the organization through multiple influential factors such as the business the organization is engaged with, external stakeholders associated with it, its

geographical position, size and age of the organization, facilities, values, beliefs, and assumptions. (Fill 2013, 394)

Organizational culture consists different levels that can be observed. The first level is the physical aspect; how the organization can be viewed through its external communication. The second level is the values of the key personnel and how the company is being managed. The third level of the organizational culture is the members' behaviour which is formed by assumption on how things are done in different situations which makes it the strongest level of organizational culture that guides members' behaviour through beliefs. To change a strong organizational culture can be a long and difficult process. However, organizational culture cannot be considered a static phenomenon as it evolves over time and organizational change. (Fill 2013, 394)

Organizational strategic credibility is divided into four determinants; the organization's strategic capability, past performance, corporate communication and the credibility of the CEO. Strategically credible organizations with open and non-regulated corporate communication are thought to improve employee motivation, promote closer relationships with support networks (e.g. financial community), and improve stock market valuation and price per earnings multiples. Strategic credibility refers to how favourable the key stakeholders see the organization's overall strategy and processes and how capable the organization is of achieving its objectives. (Fill 2013, 400-401)

Past performance can promote or decrease confidence towards the overall organization's strategic credibility. Strong financial background, improved market position or achieved growth can improve the perception while poor past performance can decrease it significantly. However, without effective and properly managed corporate communications the organization's strategic capability and past performance can easily fall short in the eyes of the stakeholders even against objectively good results. For example, sharing the organization's strategic vision is a positive indicator of the strategic capabilities and communication of intended and planned performances. The visibility and ability of the CEO to communicate with stakeholders is also crucial for the strategic credibility of an organization. The overall reputation of the organization can improve by visible, strong, balanced, and positive communication made by the CEO. The CEO sets the tone for corporate communications and internal branding as employees are seen to follow and align behind their leader. (Fill 2013, 402-403)

3.4 The employee's brand engagement

Brito (2018) argues that organizations should look for real employee engagement that goes far beyond the environmental aspects (figure 12). Employee engagement is creating an emotional response within the employees that they belong to something bigger than their everyday job might suggest. (Brito 2018, 28)

Creating this emotional response is partly formed by the environment within which the employees interact but also by the experiences the employees have. Leadership engagement is one of the key aspects to creating the experience that enforces the feeling that promotes brand engagement. Leaders who are authentic, present, and dignified; those who hold others accountable, lead with integrity, and show empathy create higher levels of employee engagement. Once the required environmental and experiential aspects are created, the efforts need to be enforced by providing regular feedback. Studies imply that the engagement levels increase dramatically when employees receive feedback about their weaknesses and strengths. On the other hand, with little or no feedback, employees feel disengaged from their workplace. (Brito 2018, 28-30)

<p>Purpose + positive experience + celebrating success openly + ongoing interaction = real employee engagement</p>
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Figure 12. Real employee engagement (adapted from Brito 2018, 29)

To engage and align employees towards the same direction includes three core elements: empowerment, support, and purpose (figure 13). Empowerment makes the individual feel valued and respected for the role which they occupy and for what they bring to the organization. Exploiting the employee's inner drive and providing them encouragement and a suitable environment enables each individual to utilize their full potential. Active support creates consistency for the people's empowerment. It provides the employees with confidence to operate in the manners that lead to the right decisions. Purpose provides people with the answer to the question "why" and "what difference does it make to the end result". Clear purpose and direction inspire people to work hard and to make a difference. (Everett 2016, 27-29)

The elements of empowerment, support, and purpose, together with the tools for the employees to develop their own personal brand, create true employee engagement (Everett 2016, 29). Personal brand is ultimately what other people say and think about the individual. Each individual has it whether they have been consciously developing it or not. It consists of layers and is built from inside out starting from the authentic core. The authentic core is supported and represented by the individual's values, strength, and

purpose in life. These are packed into the personal brand that projects the authentic personality in a consistent way with every interaction through the outer layer that keeps the brand visible and prominent. The expectations of the outside world can easily mould the visible layer and make the individual subconsciously behave in contradiction to who they really are, against their authentic core. To provide a consistent, clear, and authentic personal brand image, one needs to align the layers more strategically and purposefully. (Everett 2016, 109-110)

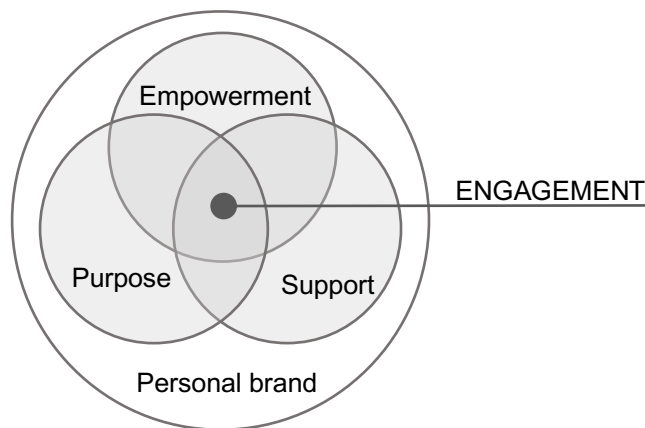


Figure 13. True engagement through empowerment, support, and purpose (adapted from Everett 2016, 29)

Everett (2016, 55) determines that in order to truly engage employees, employee branding needs to align corporate values and people's behaviour on the way they communicate by;

- Affecting on their emotional intelligence rather than mechanics on how to do their work
- Becoming embedded with the individual's habits and natural way of doing things
- Internalizing the organizational values and interpreting them in their own way makes the individuals feel that they belong and that they are not somebody they are not
- Doing something in alignment with their own purpose and values to create more authentic behaviour and feeling (not only the best for the organization but for themselves too)

Creating brand engagement includes multiple challenges and is constantly evolving. It requires different techniques and understanding of what employees require from the organization. One way to look at it is through the criteria that different generations create (table 4). Contemporary workplaces consist currently of four different generations; baby boomers, millennials (generation Y), generation Z, and generation X. All of these generations have some parts in common, but the focus and criteria on the requirements changes and becomes more demanding rapidly (the estimation that by 2020 already half of the leadership positions are represented by the millennials). This affects the techniques, processes, and initiatives to create employee engagement. (Everett 2016, 65-67)

Table 4. Work life criteria among generation Y and generation Z (adapted from Brito 2018, 28; Everett 2016, 65-67)

Generation Y (Millennials)	Generation Y (Millennials) & Generation Z (Digital generation)
Brito (2018)	Everett (2016)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Steady engaging jobs - High level of well-being - Purposeful life - Active community - Social ties - Financial stability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition - Fast career progression - Variety of work - Transparent and authentic leadership - Great leadership reputation - Empowerment - Respect among peers - Social responsibility - Less internal politics - Pride in their company

Gil (2020) highlights that companies should only provide employees tools and not rules to represent the brand. A highly controlled environment is not possible nor necessary as the more steps and rules there are to be followed, the harder it will be to keep the employees committed and engaged. However, with the right resources and platforms that offer pre-written content, how-to guidelines and incentives, the employees can successfully represent the brand. (Gil 2020, 129)

3.5 The employee's brand-oriented behaviour

From a brand-oriented perspective, the increased demand and diversity of interactions between employees and customers (often out of control of the organization) needs to be inspired by the overall brand positioning. This requires instruments that leads employees to brand commitment and brand-oriented behaviour. Brand-oriented behaviour, which is also called brand-related behaviour and brand-driven behaviour, attempts to transform an employee's established behaviour into behaviour that would strengthen the brand and express its values. (Ind 2017, 14-15)

Both organizations and its stakeholders contribute to the creation of a brand; organizations through paid and owned media and stakeholders through word of mouth, posts, reviews, shares and others that contribute to the brand's reputation. As the brand evolves through an ongoing negotiation between brand managers and stakeholders, Ind (2017) suggests that the desired employee's brand-oriented behaviour can only be formed through the employees own individual way of articulating the brand to the customers. (Ind 2017, 14-15)

To encourage the employees to make the right decisions and to form an environment that shows appropriate brand-related behaviour requires that a brand-driven culture is formed (figure 14). The brand-related culture consists of values, norms, and symbols which are based on corporate culture. It acts as a driver for brand-related behaviour which consists of brand-related analyses and other activities such as marketing mix. The brand-related behaviour also affects brand-related culture. (Ind 2017, 16-17)

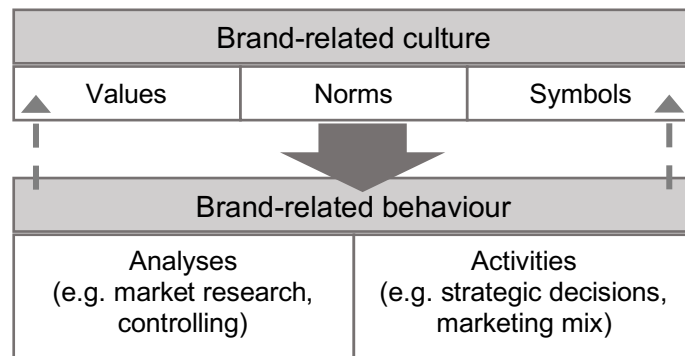


Figure 14. Model of brand orientation (adapted from Ind 2017, 17)

The purpose of the employee's brand-oriented behaviour is to make the employees contribute to the organization's brand oriented-efforts both on and off work. Successful brand-oriented behaviour can be formed by looking into how values, norms, and symbols are understood, how well employees are aware of them, how they like them, and if they are able to apply them. Employee brand-oriented behaviour can take two forms; brand-supportive behaviour and brand-strengthening behaviour. (Ind 2017, 34)

Brand-supportive behaviour refers to consistent and dependable acts of the employees and brand representatives. Its purpose is to provide a consistent brand experience for the customers which is in line with the brand promise made by the organization. Failure to meet the set behavioural brand expectations can lead to customer dissatisfaction which makes the brand-supportive employee a "must have". Brand-supportive behaviour is typically specified in codices, manuals, or display rules. (Ind 2017, 34)

Brand-strengthening behaviour, on the other hand, is voluntary and considered to be for the good of the brand. This employee behaviour occurs either by participating in brand development or by positive word of mouth actions. By participating in brand development, employees pass internally brand-relevant information from customer touch points to managers. It includes information of improvement potential and therefore is typically more valuable to the organization than market research due to lower costs and higher quality. Positive word of mouth type of behavioural actions refer to an employee's willingness to endorse the brand from outside of the context of the job. These peer-to-peer

recommendations create a more credible and powerful promotion of the brand in the employee's personal surroundings than any company-issued communication or advertisement. It makes the difference between brand-supportive and brand-strengthening behaviour as it goes beyond securing the brand image and equity; it helps to increase it by creating a highly effective means of customer acquisition and saves in advertising costs. (Ind 2017, 34-35)

Ind (2017) brings up two different leadership styles which foster brand-oriented behaviour: brand-specific transactional leadership style (TRL) and brand-specific transformational leadership style (TFL). These two leadership styles activate different psychological processes in the employees and therefore trigger different brand-oriented behaviour (table 5). (Ind 2017, 35)

The TRL leadership style is based on a series of exchanges: a reward is received in return for delivering a desired outcome. Leaders set goals, gives instructions and define processes and conditions to achieve these goals. According to an employee's performance, leaders give rewards or introduce punishments which make the positive and negative contingent reinforcements the core composition of the leadership style. TRL is preferred in organizations that seek standardized service and consistent and coherent presentation with customer interactions. In the context of employee branding efforts, it offers clarity on roles and clear behavioural rules and ideas for the employees on how to constitute the desired brand-representative behaviour. (Ind 2017, 35-37)

In contrast, the TFL leadership style aims to involve employees emotionally in order to change their motives and goals for the good of the whole organization. TFL leaders try to influence the employee's identification, commitment, and trust in the organizational mission through the employee's inherent motivation. It requires leaders to mobilize their teams with meaningful vision, acting as role models, and by supporting employees intellectual and personal development. The main components are inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. TFL enhances employees not only to play a role as brand representatives but also to live it and adapt it situationally. By transforming the employee's concept of self, TFL leads not only to brand-supportive behaviour but also to brand-strengthening behaviour. Integration between brand representative role and the employee's self-concept will generate high employee motivation to engage in extra efforts to strengthen the brand image as the employees own identity is tied to it. Such self-motivated extra efforts to strengthen the brand can be actions such as word of mouth and active engagement in brand development. (Ind 2017, 37-40)

Table 5. Managerial role and pros and cons between TRL- and TFL leadership styles (adapted from Ind 2017, 36-42)

Transactional leadership style (TRL)	Transformational leadership style (TFL)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sets behavioural standards on how to act as brand representatives and offer rewards for delivering it - Monitors employees' compliances and takes corrective actions in case of deviance, mistakes or errors - Targets brand-supportive behaviour (first steps) - Suitable for the first steps; employees' immature or new or (needs guidance or structure) or flexible enough to interpret the brand vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being a role model by living the brand values and promise in everyday work - Encourages employees to reframe their jobs as brand representative - Empowers and helps employees to interpret the brand promise and its implications to their job through their individual job profiles - Teaches and coaches employees to grow into their roles as brand representatives - Targets brand-supportive and brand-strengthening behaviour (organizational change towards brand-orientation) - Suitable if required leadership knowledge and ability is in posses
<p>PROS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Clarity of roles, tasks and performance expectations for employees + Creates transparency, trust, fairness and security <p>CONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Close monitoring and behavioural standards lead to highly reliable and uniform demeanour at customer touch point - Externally imposed behavioural models can appear as inauthentic and over-rehearsed - Rules and scripts can prevent spontaneity, flexibility and true emotional expressions; can lead to self-alienation and burnout 	<p>PROS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Promotes excellent people management and subjective and objective performance criteria + Positive influence on employee satisfaction, commitment, identification, organizational citizenship + Employee internalization; employees' brand-related role as integral part of self-concepts (congruence between brand and own values) <p>CONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can overcharge employees; too much autonomy and responsibility can leave employees feel uncertain, pressured, and unconfident - Need to challenge the current way of doing things and seek for improvements - Strong attachment to TFL leader might develop into dysfunctional dependency; identify with the person, not with the brand or promotes employee manipulation

To fully adapt brand-oriented behaviour to an organization, the TRL leadership style can provide the initial steps for visible changes in the employee's behaviour and start the process. However, to create a fundamental shift in the organization, the TFL leadership style is needed to change the perspective of the employees to see their jobs and themselves as brand representatives. The transformational leader's role is to make sense of the organization's goals and values and clarify them through the brand's vision. Employees are then meant to internalize their roles as brand representatives in an authentic and natural way. In essence, both leadership styles have their own pros and cons and have their own motivational processes and behavioural outcomes. They are

used in different contexts and for different goals which can make either one of them more suitable for a particular situation. (Ind 2017, 41-42)

Ind (2017) highlights that implementing brand-oriented behaviour in practice can prove to be very different than in theory. Its difficulty lies in its dependence on the organization's culture and how clear the brand ideology is and its correspondence to the values, norms and symbols, and most importantly, if the employees choose to support the brand implementation or not. It also has a precondition of well-established brand management that has a clear view on the brand ideology, norms and brand-related symbols. Even though some sort of normative control is recommended, too strict and explicit rules on brand behaviour can prove to be counterproductive. Therefore, to support employees' brand-related behaviour, brand managers need to accept that they can only set basic parameters for the employees' brand-oriented behaviour. (Ind 2017, 28-29)

Cushen (2019) argues in the study 'Branding employees' that the different perspectives of normative control at work can account for the failure or perpetuation of employee branding. The study showed that by applying normative control on its purest conceptual sense and linking ideal employee identity to the organization's brand can create an artificial construct and result in being counterproductive. Employees are more than capable of deciding themselves what experiential forces are the most substantive which is why organizational attempts to insert externally constructed belief systems can become critically interpreted by the them. Nevertheless, the study also suggests that the pursuit of normative control can result in being a plausible management strategy due to the normative control's purveyor's (typically executives and human resource) strong belief in it, therefore perpetuating the employee branding process. However, the study suggests that normative controls power is usually considered to be far greater than it actually is and to fashion an ideal employee identity based on organizational brand should be comprised of a variety of experiential forces, not just normative control. (Cushen, 2009)

3.6 Employee branding in practice

Everett (2016) describes the basis for employer and employee branding to be five key principles (figure 15); employee value proposition (EVP), brand power, brand experience, brand appeal, and brand activation. These elements will provide the organization an understanding of its current position and enable it to assess how the employees feel about the brand. (Everett 2016, 63)

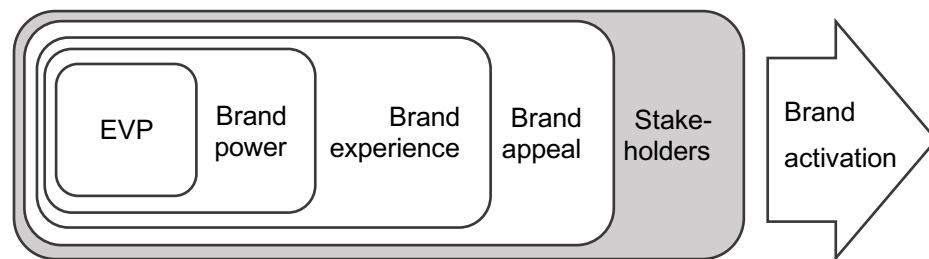


Figure 15. Key principles for employee- and employer branding

The EVP measures and researches the reasons why the current and potential employees joined or would join the company and why they continue to work for the organization. It's used to communicate to the target audience the values of the organization and what it means to work for the organization. Brand power determines how the organization differentiates from the competition by provoking an emotional response to attract and retain top talent so that they feel that they are involved in something unique. The actual brand image that the members and non-members experience, whether good or bad, is the reflection of the brand experience. It creates a link between the brand and the current employees. Brand appeal, on the other hand, is the image that the organization creates of its own brand. It's how the organization sees itself or wants to be seen by others. The last element is brand activation, or in other words, brand building. Its purpose is to highlight the importance of actually deploying the brand in all of the planned campaigns by the stakeholders in a consistent and effective way. (Everett 2016, 63-64)

Internal brand management's (IBM) purpose is to implement the brand cognitively, affectively, and behaviourally at the employee level. It involves all of the organization's employees, whether directly or indirectly involved with the customers, as each individual has a role in shaping the brand promise and supplying it internally. (Ind 2017, 173-174) Ind (2017) combines the managerial IBM practices and the outcomes of IBM relationships on employees (figure 16). The employee-related IBM outcomes are affected by managerial IBM practices which rely on brand-oriented leadership, brand-oriented human resource management, and internal and external communication (appendix 4). (Ind 2017, 181)

Brand-oriented leadership practices include brand-oriented transactional (TRL) and transformational (TFL) and empowering leadership styles. The brand-oriented human resource management's practices include personnel recruitment and selection, induction, personnel development, and reward and compensation practices. (Ind 2017, 181-187)

For internal brand communication practices managers should create central, lateral, and cascade means of brand-related communication. The purpose of central communication is

to create awareness and distribute general, updated information about the brand through mass media such as intranet, brochures, magazines, and brand books. The lateral communication is created by peer-to-peer sharing and employment of organizational storytellers whereas the cascade communication makes use of hierarchical relationship to provide a source of information that appears more credible. The external brand communication practices also concern IBM as employees are often secondary recipients of external advertisements and public relationship messages. It shapes the employee's thinking and affects their perceived knowledge of the desired brand through implicit and explicit statements about the behaviours that employees are expected to perform. (Ind 2017, 187-195)

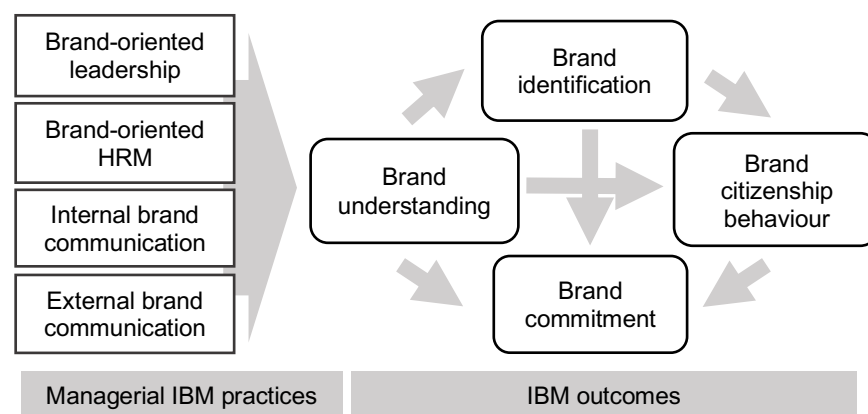


Figure 16. Internal brand management model (adapted from Ind 2017, 194)

Brito (2018) describes an employee advocacy model that is based on employee engagement. The execution of the model requires leaders to build a flexible, tailored, and strategic approach for the particular organization. Employees need to be the top priority and their experience, challenges, and skills need to act as the core from which everything else is developed. In other words, employee advocacy programs need to be created in the organization starting from the inside out. The architecture of the employee advocacy programme includes the creation of a customized employee experience, the establishment of a measurement framework, and the development and leveraging of content (figure 17, table 6). (Brito 2018, 109-110)

The measurement framework is established at the beginning. Its purpose is to enhance the understanding of how the employee advocacy program is performing. It starts by defining and clarifying the desired outcomes from business and marketing decisions. This typically includes both tangible and intangible goals even though tangible ones should be preferred in order to be able to measure the results effectively. An analytical approach featuring data collection of each action in the employee advocacy program is crucial. It allows the creation of a clear and compelling business story that can be shared in order to

obtain internal buy-in which allows the program to expand and grow. Measurement can be divided into three correlated pillars: measuring the programs adaptation, measuring the participation and engagement, and measuring real business outcomes. (Brito 2018, 115-117)

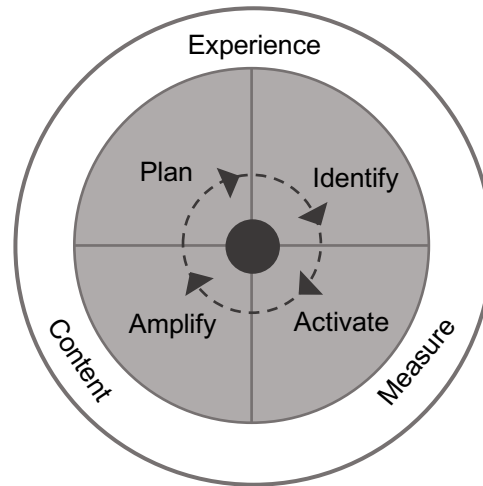


Figure 17. Employee architecture (adapted from Brito 2018, 110)

Customizing the employee experience requires tailoring and personalization. In order to have employees share and create content that allows people to engage with. This requires employee segmentation where the organizations approach should be tailored according to the different interests, goals, and job functions. The customized employee experience should therefore reflect the employees themselves as individuals and as representatives of the brand and help them in their day to day work. To ensure the continued adaptability and success of the employee experience, the possibility to provide and receive feedback on every aspect of the employee advocacy program needs to be embedded into it. (Brito 2018, 110-114)

The content itself also plays an important role as employees needs to feel invested in it and believe in the value of the content they are sharing. Content that does not mean anything to the employees or does not align with their beliefs will only weaken the loyalty of the employee advocacy program and even the brand and organization. The goal is not only to involve employees who work closely with selling, promoting, and validating products, but also to involve the ones who are not typically content creators and sharers. Diverse content and content integrity provides more authentic cross organizational information that non-members of the organization will not see as devaluated content (e.g. direct marketing), rather as worthwhile reading. This practice, expanded across the business, will make the brand more human and allow the members and non-members to feel more essential to it with their values and voices mirrored and heard. (Brito 2018, 110-114)

Storytelling is developing content that resonates with people personally and professionally. It requires empathy to tell stories of our own lives and the lives of others that impact their own plot. Such stories are filled with emotions and experiences that inspire and change people. Brand storytelling as a part of the employee advocacy program makes use of this. (Brito 2018, 122-123) “The tangible aspects of employee advocacy are all about storytelling, sharing, engagement, and reach – or, more specifically, being able to drastically increase all of those” (Brito 2018, 110).

To enable an employee to become a storyteller, the employee needs to be able to access the right content at the right time to increase its impact. The content needs to be provided with a clear breakdown of the brand’s message so that different types of employees can adapt it and share it through their own voice and methods. By facilitating and guiding the stories in real time, leaders can help the stories evolve. However, the stories cannot be dictated, or employees forced to be advocates, as it can only cause people to resent the efforts made to make the programme work. On the other hand, motivating and communicating why the employee advocacy programme is important and worthwhile for the employees supports its growth. (Brito 2018, 122-124)

Table 6. Three steps to employee advocacy model (adapted from Brito 2018, 110-125)

Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the desired outcome (the “why”) - What business outcomes are expected <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme adoption - Participation and engagement - Real measurable business outcomes
Employee experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empowering employees to become storytellers - Employee segmentation; different interests, goals and job functions - Align content that employee feel invested to and believe in - Involve employees that do not typically create and share content; creates more diverse and authentic content that non-members can believe in - Makes the brand more human; making people inside and out to start feel more vital of the brand and their values mirrored and voices heard
Content & storytelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Right content at the right time through training and planning - Clear brand content breakdown; employees need to be able to adapt and share it through their own voice and method - Guiding and facilitating; helps the story to evolve in real time – cannot be dictated

The three core types of employee-driven content are thought leadership, company representative in the broader industry-related story, and employee perspective of relevant broader market-external events or topics (table 7). These core types have two key benefits: spreading brand awareness and providing employees a clear position of brand authority. (Brito 2018, 124)

With thought leadership, the employees are the topic expert by demonstrating their advanced knowledge on a specific subject that other stakeholders in the industry are trying to align with. Its purpose is to develop the subject and create interest around it as well as to underline the connection between the individual talent to whom people want to listen and the company. For the employee it offers the potential to advance the individual's career and expand their network. The thought leadership subject is often written from the perspective of the company and published by the company itself. However, it should not be limited only to senior staff or individuals in leadership positions as there are plenty of other company-wide experts to be used for thought leadership content. (Brito 2018, 124-125)

The second core type of employee-driven content is the positioning of the employee as a company representative in a broader story about an industry trend, event, or other issue. This content is not typically about the organization even though an employee gives an expert view on the topic. It provides the same benefits as the thought leadership but also places the employee at the same level with other industry experts and provides them authority. The third one is the most flexible employee-driven content as the perspective is given for an external topic that is somewhat related to the broader market or to the company. With this type the employees are in the middle of a conversation where the relevant people care about the subject deeply enough to talk about it. It offers the employees the opportunity to get the brand involved, offer their expertise, and even drive others to learn about the company and its products. (Brito 2018, 124-125)

Table 7. Core types of employee-driven content (adapted from Brito 2018, 124-125)

1.	Thought leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Written and published from the perspective of the company - Creates interest and connects individual talent with the company while advances employees' personal career and network
2.	Company representative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not about the company itself; broader story of the industry - Thought leadership benefits but also positions employees' level with other industry experts and provides authority
3.	Employee perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topic that is somewhat related to the industry or the company - Enables employees to affect to people who care about the subject by providing their expertise

It is essential that whichever content the employees are encouraged to create needs to be useful to the people who engage with it as well as relevant for the employees themselves. The content cannot be an extension of advertising or else it will lack the necessary authenticity and humanity and will not have the desired impact on the recipient. At least one of the eight core values listed in the table 8 should be included in the content. (Brito 2019, 125-126)

Table 8. Contents core values and their targeted perception (adapted from Brito 126)

Utility	Describes how the product works, why the company is talking about something, helps the customer to solve an issue they have
Education	Teaches about a topic, product, feature, company leader or industry trend
Entertainment	It is light-hearted, inspiring and highly memorable; the ultimate use of storytelling in enterprise content
Access	Connects people who share the same interests, passions or purpose
Emotion	Incites passionate reaction; either strongly agreeing or controversial
Exclusivity	Creates a special and invested feeling as a customer or industry member
Information	Provides news, insider information or useful and relevant viewpoints
Promotional	Gives more information about products before they actually buy

Gil (2020) determines that the first step to a successful employee advocacy program rollout is selling the concept internally. It includes meeting with the executive leadership team and key stakeholders and selling the benefits of the program. The next step is to select the platform and beta test it with a group of associates. The platform itself should include sufficient content for beta testing and a well-reasoned “why” for the employees to sign into it. It should work as a hub for the employees to find pre-written examples and guides. (Gil 2020, 131-132)

The next step is to identify passionate employees who are natural storytellers and promoters of the brand. It creates internal buy-in and helps to create a strong foundation for the model by having each participating associate to log into the platform in order to gain increased coverage of brand awareness in different medias. Maintaining the momentum after the initial rollout is crucial. It requires aligning the corporate communication and repeating the “why” for each department and assigned team leaders in order to secure adoption and gain visibility. Aligning with human and resource departments enables the programs implementation organization-wide and from the beginning of the employees’ employment. The last step is to keep the momentum alive. The results and determined key performance indicators (KPI’s) should be reported to key stakeholders regularly. (Gil 2020, 132-135)

The eight steps to introduce an employee advocacy program (Gil 2020, 136-137):

- Sell the concept internally to key stakeholders
- Select the platform; an all-inclusive simplified content hub for employees to use
- Identify key employees who are passionate and natural storytellers
- Test the platform prior to enterprise-wide launch and get feedback
- Align with corporate communication; announcement of why to use it
- Create an intranet FAQ & live webinar; serves as training guideline and answer hub
- Align with HR; implement the program for new recruits
- Report results and KPIs; new impressions, web site clicks, leads, and closed sales as a result of employee sharing

3.7 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the study is divided into three main phases (figure 18). The first phase concentrates on assessing the case company's present state. The assessment is divided into two sections. The first section examines the employee's emotional and intellectual buy-in while the second section assesses the employee's brand engagement level. The two sections are analysed in order to determine the case company's present state and readiness for the employee branding development.

The second phase concentrates on developing internal brand management (IBM) practices and brand activation according to the findings in the present state analysis. The IBM practices include brand-oriented leadership, human resource management (HRM), and internal and external communication, while the brand activation concentrates on creating brand engagement through employee value proposition (EVP), brand power, experience, and appeal. The purpose of the second phase is to create brand-oriented managerial practices that enable on-brand behavioural and attitudinal outcomes.

The third and final phase is implementing an employee branding model into practice. It's based on the employee advocacy architecture of creating measurements, customizing employee experience, and creating employee-driven content. The employee branding model is tested in a specific platform prior to launch in order to collect feedback and make adjustments. The third phase's goal is to make a successful organizational-wide launch.

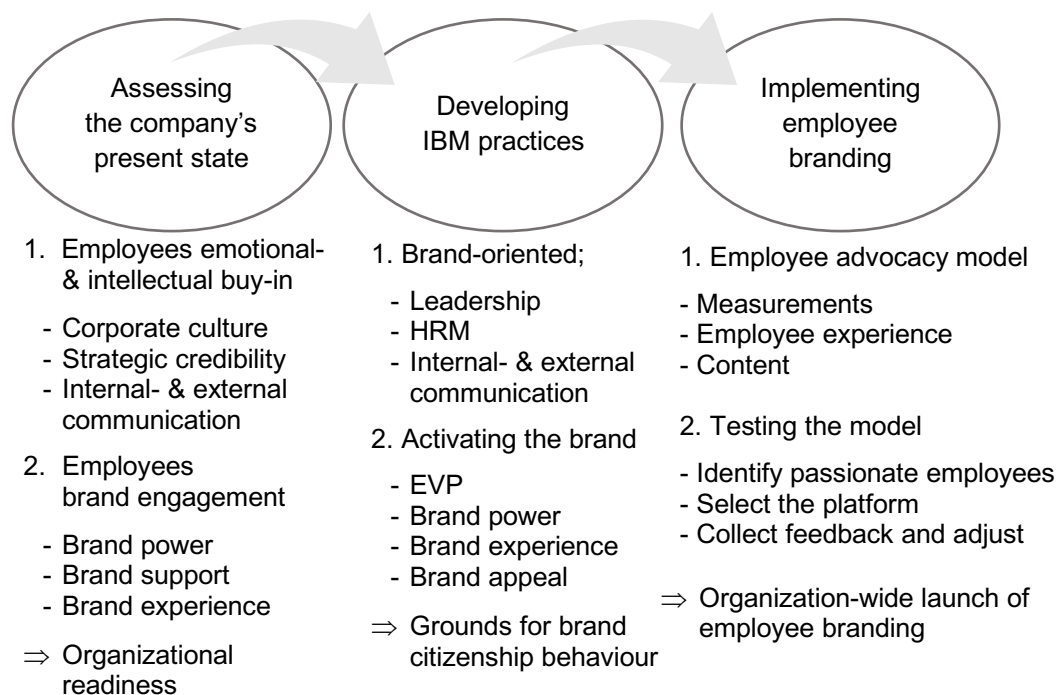


Figure 18. The study's theoretical framework

4 Present state analysis

4.1 Observations

The case company has a strong financial background and the capability to perform strategically, making it a stable and reliable employer and actor in its community. As proof of past performance and as an indicator of the strategic capabilities, the company has been listed in the top tier of its own industry for over a decade and therefore has received the “Achiever” -certificate from Kauppalehti Oy. The “Achiever” is a status that is granted to companies due to their financial performance, stability of the business with solid growth, good financial results and profitability, and strong financial structure and liquidity to ensure continued operation (Almatalent, 2020). In addition, the company has received within the last few years the “Huippuyritys” -certificate which puts the company among the top three per mil of the Finnish companies with the same key indicators as the “Achiever - certificate”. Similarly, the company’s AA+ to AAA -credit rating has earned it the “Strongest in Finland” -certificate from Suomen Asiakastieto Oy in the last decade.

According to the case company’s employee handbook (“Welcome to the company booklet”) the company’s values are meant to direct the everyday operations and are considered to be the foundation for the company’s vision and strategy. The company’s values are equality, humanity, customer orientation, employee pride, regeneration and reliability. The meaning of each value is opened up in the employee handbook in order to explain what they really mean for the company. (Company X, 2019)

The purpose of the company is communicated in a slightly inconsistent way in different channels. According to the employee handbook, which works as an internal source of corporate communication, the case company’s mission statement is to “offer the best possible price-quality ratio solutions by designing and manufacturing its products in its niche market and be able to offer them straight from the stock” (Company X, 2019). A majority of the web sources with the description of the purpose of the company imitates and variates a similar tone and language set in the employee handbook. However, a few main sources, such as the company’s web page, alter the tone and language to be more sharp, self-aware, and in a way more personal. In spite of the differences in the projection of the company’s own identity, the two approaches still share the main values and core purpose which can be seen in the day to day operations.

The case company’s corporate communication on the web creates an image of a professional but approachable business that has a specific offering and expertise to provide (appendix 5). The reflected image combines specific information on the

company's offering together with the people and events behind it which promote human aspects of the business and support the set values. The company's social media presence is comprehensive and active with recent posts in all of the major channels (LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, and YouTube). However, the number of followers in all of the channels in total counts less than 400 followers. In addition, the external communication includes monthly e-letters aimed at the external stakeholders to inform relevant information on the company's operations and references.

The company's internal communications lean on a business communication platform called Slack. Slack is a collaborative software that enables instant messaging, company-wide channels, team channels, cross-organizational channels as well as file sharing and tools for different forms of remote work (Slack, 2020). It is one of the company's main and most used internal communication methods whether the messaging is regarding on or off work topics. Messages related to work topics are still the vast majority of the communication as the platform is divided into different company-wide channels that include every aspect of the business from general announcements to specific product or external stakeholder related matter. The usage and activity in the platform can be reviewed by Slack Analytics (appendix 6).

Each of the company's current employees is registered to the platform. In addition to the internal stakeholders, the platform is shared with two non-members of the organization. These non-members belong to the case company's partially owned Northern Spain company and therefore are accounted as part of the key stakeholders. In total, 14 users are registered to the platform.

The figure 19 shows the activity rates of all of the users by the average daily activity and posted messages during the observation period. The "daily active members" refers to users that read a public channel in the last day while the 'daily posted messages' refers to the number of users who posted at least one message in the last day. During the observation period, by average over 40 % of the users posted a message each day while approximately 70 % of the users read a public channel message each day.

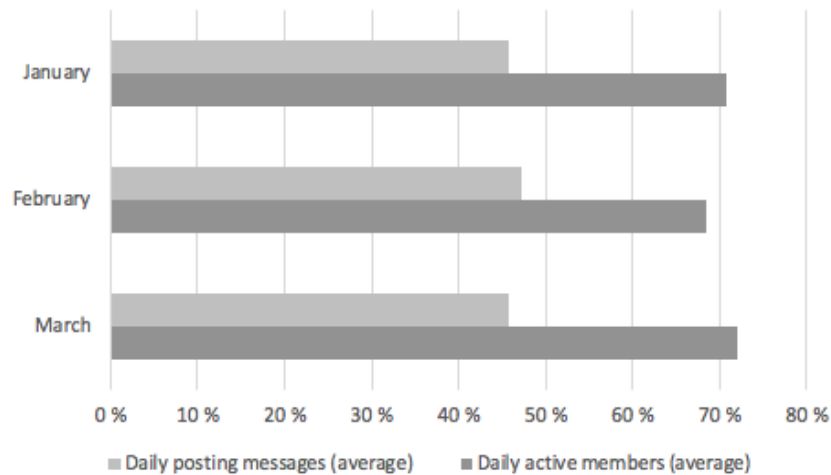


Figure 19. Activity in case company's internal business communication platform during January-March 2020

A majority of the messages sent on the platform are direct messages between users. It accounted for on average 64 % of total messages sent during the observation period while the company-wide public channels covered 37,5 % of the messages in the same period. In total, the users send on average 52 messages each business day (figure 20). The number of sent messages showed an increase during the observation period. However, due to the limited observation period, factors such as public holidays, employees' vacations, and seasonal influence on the business activities can impact the employee's activity in the internal communication platform.

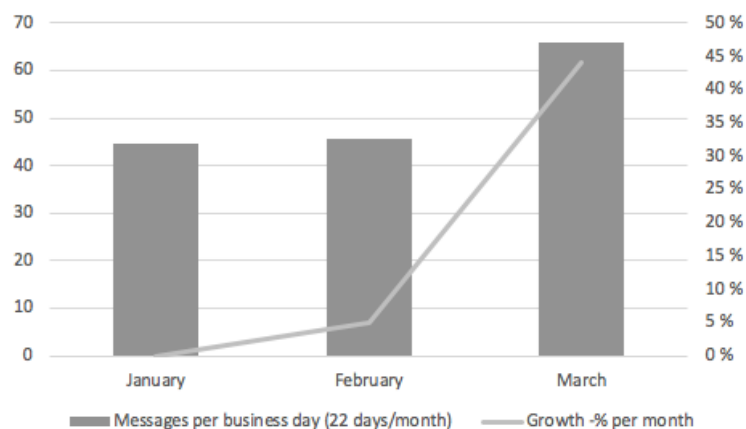


Figure 20. Sent messages per business day in case company's internal business communication platform during January-March 2020

According to the author's own experience, the company's set values are highly visible in the personnel's day to day operations. They are an important part of the company's culture and affect the people's behaviour and choices. The purpose of the company is well regarded by the employees. However, the communication about the company's goals and

their relevance to the employees' still needs improvement. Nevertheless, due to the past performance and improved brand visibility, the company's overall strategic credibility seems to be rather high. The improved external communication over the last few years has increased the brand's visibility especially on the web which in return has reflected back to the employee's experience of the brand. The use of the internal communication platform has diminished the use of emails and unnecessary meetings and calls between the personnel. It has created an easily approachable channel that is in company-wide use.

4.2 In-depth CEO interview

The in-depth interview with the CEO was held to gain access and contextual data for the case company's current situation. The interview structure was altered from the employee interview structures by concentrating only on brand leadership, personal brand and brand experience, brand power, communication, brand support and employee behaviour. The central responses and phrases are translated by the author from Finnish to English.

The case company's history as a small family-owned company has affected and still affects the brand power and brand leadership style. The company differentiates itself through its values which have an emphasis on customer service and the tenets of a family-oriented company that sees its employees as whole and aims for equal rights for all.

"I want to believe that we are seen as a trustworthy and reliable partner who truly acts according to its values. This can be proven through our long-term partnerships and good business results year after year." (CEO, 27.4.2020)

"In principle, we do not have staff that would not be customer service oriented" (CEO, 27.4.2020).

The organizational structure is flat, and the leadership is concentrated mainly in the current CEO who represents the family-owned company's second generation. The CEO's own identity and values are closely connected to the family business and at least partially shaped by them. This makes the brand leadership personified around the CEO and highly affected by the family's values.

"The fact that I'm leading the company alone affects my leadership style such that it often depends on my own feelings, which bothers me quite a lot. It means that my feelings affect my interest level to develop and advance things and when not, they feel like they kind of stop. This makes the leadership style too volatile." (CEO, 27.4.2020)

In general, the CEO describes the leadership style as open, human, and increasingly more demanding in order for the individuals and the community to succeed.

“I personally feel that we have a very open leadership style. Sometimes it even concentrates a bit too much on the individual’s wellbeing by putting the company’s overall business thinking aside.” (CEO, 27.4.2020)

Brand management has developed and become more active in the recent years. It’s driven by the company’s values and leans more and more towards the company’s know-how and expertise which was partially “hidden” in the past years. This can be seen in the brand’s good position in the domestic markets among the stakeholders but not so much in the international markets. In general, the external communication has improved during the recent years by being more visible, professional, and customer oriented.

The CEO sees the corporate communication’s biggest challenge to be internal communication. Internal communication has been improved through the implementation of new platforms and processes. However, the lack of its systematic and comprehensive development and the understanding of each person’s own responsibility to deliver it is still missing.

“I would highlight two things that are not at a sufficient level when it comes to communicating something new. The first one is that our communication has not ensured that everyone truly understands what is being conveyed. The second one is that the message is not spread to all parties internally. The customers have been listened to rather carefully but our reaction and action to the feedback internally is substantially slower.” (CEO, 27.4.2020)

According to the CEO, the employee’s behaviour is mostly according to the brand. Exceptions apply but in general people reflects the brand promise surprisingly well through the company’s culture and values. The unity of a rather small and connected group of people who are open to talk helps support the culture. “I want to believe that our desire to do our best is transmitted all the way to the customers in this way” (CEO, 27.4.2020).

The company’s brand behaviour support leans towards an orientation program. The orientation program has been further developed during the recent years, but its successful implementation has been rather limited and varies between the employees. There is no company-wide rewarding or compensation policy even though several individuals are under a performance-based pay system. “In my opinion, our company’s well-being and

teaming events, as well as all the daily activities that join the people together are brand supportive actions” (CEO, 27.4.2020).

4.3 Company-wide questionnaire

To assess the case company’s current situation and grounds for the implementation of employee branding, a company-wide questionnaire was conducted. The questionnaire was directed to all of the company’s personnel, excluding the author. The response rate was high, accounting for 10 out of 11 possible responders (90%).

The questionnaire included 21 questions that can be divided into six categories: culture, credibility, communication, brand experience, brand power, and brand support (appendix 1). Each question was posed in the form of a claim to which the responder was able to answer according to a scale of 1 to 5. The scale’s lowest number states that the responder “fully disagrees” with the statement and the highest number that the responder “fully agrees” with the statement. The average score across all of the categories was 3.7 out of 5 (figure 21).

Table 9 demonstrates the average score by question and the question’s category. When assessing the results by ranking the average score of each question from the highest to the lowest, the table demonstrates how each category’s position accounts for high and low average scores. The only category that does not count any average score above 3.5 is the “brand support”.

Table 9. Company-wide questionnaire’s results per question and average score (Questions are translated from Finnish to English. Appendix 2 includes the questions in original form)

AV.E SCORE	CATEGORY	QUESTION
4.3	Brand experience	I would recommend the company's products to others
4.3	Brand experience	I am proud to be working in the company
4.1	Culture	I think the company's leadership is active and committed
4.1	Communication	I feel that the company's purpose and goals are clear to me
4.1	Credibility	I feel that the company has a good opportunity to achieve its goals
4.1	Credibility	I think the company has a good record of past performance
4	Brand power	I have a strong image of what the company represents
3.9	Brand power	I have a good understanding of what the company promises to provide to others
3.9	Brand experience	My overall experience of the company is very good
3.7	Communication	The company communicates consistently enough of the matters important to me
3.7	Culture	I have a good understanding on how things should be carried out in the company
3.6	Culture	I have a clear understanding of what the company expects of me
3.5	Brand experience	I feel that I am valued in the company
3.5	Brand power	I think that the company differentiates from others clearly
3.5	Brand support	I am being offered tools and guidelines to carry out my job
3.4	Brand support	I feel that I receive the necessary support to carry out my job
3.4	Credibility	I feel that the leaderships communication is sufficient enough and it helps to build the company's reputation
3.4	Credibility	The company achieves its goals often
3.1	Communication	The company's communication is clear and understandable
3.1	Communication	The company's communication is unite for the employees and the external stakeholders
3	Brand support	The company's reward- and compensation policies support and motivate me to carry out my job beyond the expected

The “brand experience” -category counted the highest average score (4). The questions with the highest average scores (4.3) were “I would recommend the company’s products to others” and “I’m proud to be working in the company”. In contrast, the question that counted the lowest average score in the “brand experience” -category (3.5) was “I feel that I’m appreciated at my workplace”. The category that counted the lowest average score was “brand support”. The question with the lowest average score (3) was “The company’s compensation policies support and motivates me to perform my job over the set expectations”, while the question with the highest average score being “I am provided tools and guidelines to do my job” (3.5).

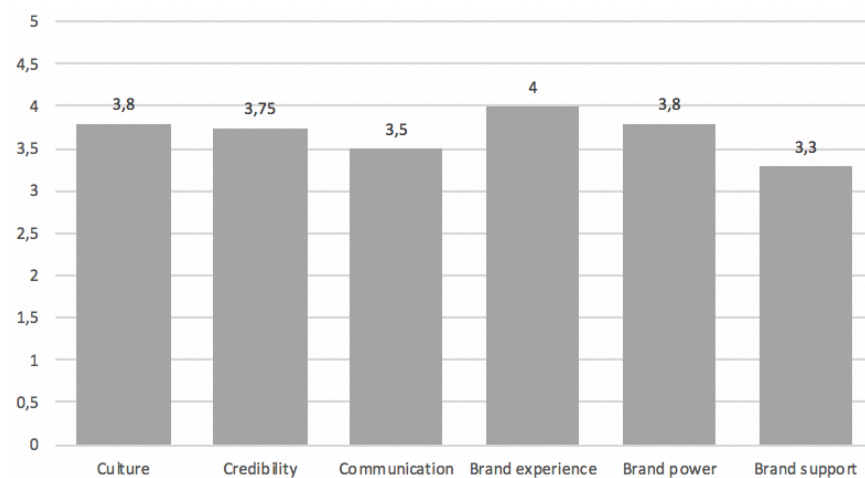


Figure 21. Company-wide questionnaire’s answers by category

4.4 In-depth employee interviews

In addition to the company-wide questionnaire, an in-depth employee interview was carried out in order to gain more insight into the case company’s current situation and employee’s thoughts on the themes introduced in the company-wide questionnaire. In total, four employees were selected for the in-depth interviews which represented over one third of the total possible participants. The interviews were conducted, depending on the situation, by face to face, by video calls, or by phone. The interview’s length varied from 35 to 65 minutes. The central responses and phrases are translated by the author from Finnish to English.

In order to gain as wide a perspective as possible and to lower the possible bias with generalization of the results, the participants were selected such that they would represent a variety of backgrounds and experiences in the company. The selection criteria included job position, gender, and work experience in the company. Half of the participants were female and the other half male. The job positions of the participants were administrative, sales, and warehouse related. The participants’ work experience in the company were

four months, one year, three years, and ten years. The participants have been kept anonymous by excluding the position and name from the study (cited as Employee 1, 2, 3 and 4).

In general, the participants described the company's culture as a very customer oriented and open community that works together closely. The customer orientation can be seen in tailored solutions and services, responsibility, and quickness of service.

"The focus is on the customers and in the fact that we always try to serve them the best way possible. This can be seen even in the smallest of deeds that are made to keep the customers happy." (Employee 4, 29.4.2020)

"The first thing that comes to my mind [about the culture] is that it has a family-owned company feel to it. It's relaxed, responsible, customers are taken seriously, and there is a desire to do things well. In addition, the coffee breaks and lunches are normally spent together, and the off-work events are a good way to improve the working atmosphere and culture and they ease the communication." (Employee 2, 24.4.2020)

The work culture's openness and intimacy are seen in collaborative behaviour on and off work, sharing of information and readiness to help other colleagues. Though as a contrast, one participant had experienced that the culture has had some qualities of it being quite introspective which might have complicated the integration of some people. Also, dismissive behaviour against the company's own operations and products can sometimes be seen internally.

"The work community is unusually close. Sometimes there are conflicts but nothing bad. Everyone gets along and people are willing to help each other. I cannot think another company that I've been working at that I could say that people are truly putting others in front of themselves. Sometimes it happens even at the expense of the person's own job. That kind of culture is rare." (Employee 3, 24.4.2020)

The most common qualities of brand promise among the participants are seen to be the domesticity and quality of the products. The brand's locality and history as an expert in the industry are seen to promote consistency and strength as an employer and actor in the markets. In addition, the willingness to quickly provide even customized solutions to the customers is thought to make the company a flexible partner for the exterior stakeholders.

"I like that the company doesn't try to expand too much but instead tries to keep its operations at the right size and keep its domesticity." (Employee 1, 23.4.2020)

“The products’ durability and quality are marketed together with our flexibility as a partner that can provide even more specialized solutions. Also, we can provide technical support that is not always our responsibility to. Internally I feel that everyone seems to know well the history of the company and how we are expected to operate as employees. It can be heard in the day to day conversations.”
(Employee 3, 24.4.2020)

Each participant found congruency with their own identity and values when compared to the company’s brand promise and culture. Several highlighted the importance of the human aspects and domesticity to their own values, and others how the different stakeholders have been treated and how one can feel a connection with others by receiving help from each other.

“I can easily find congruency. My own values state that if something is sold to others, I need to be able to stand behind its quality. Also, I feel that it is important to be able to trust that if something happens, I will not be left alone but instead I can rely that my colleagues and the company will be there.” (Employee 3, 24.4.2020)

The company’s credibility was seen to be built on how visible the brand is and how it is communicated to the external stakeholders as well as through the reliability and stability of the company as an employer. The strategic capabilities were conflicting. Some participants saw the current goals as realistic and achievable while others didn’t really know if they were achievable or not or felt that a lack of follow up of the set goals has made difficult the possibility of achieving them in recent years. More constant and planned communication could help the staff to react to the situation in order to direct it towards the set goals. Recently-implemented personal objectives have helped determine what is expected from the individual and increased the possibility of non-routine work.

The company’s communication was experienced differently between the participants according to the participant’s position and the years of experience working in the company. In general, the communication was seen rather positively even though some issues were also found. People with different jobs were indicated to receive messages of different density and tone which has affected the employee’s experience negatively or positively. On the other hand, the longer the participants had been working in the company affected positively on how the current situation was experienced. This seems to be due to the recent years’ positive developments in external and internal communication.

“The internal communication has taken huge steps in recent years. We gather and share more and more information. The progress is immense compared to the earlier years when relative information was not reported well or frequently enough or the

quality of it was rather poor. The same applies to the product documentation and general communication between us. Earlier, for example, our warehouse was bothered with unnecessary calls but now the communication has improved, and it takes the other person into account better.” (Employee 3, 24.4.2020)

The internal communication was seen to lack guidelines, repetition, and a source or materials for how to get in contact after the communication has been made. Also, some dismissive talk about the company’s operation and products was pointed out to appear. In addition, the importance of the relevant messages reaching the right person through the appropriate channel and in the right amount was highlighted.

The external communication was seen to be improved through the documentation, availability, and source of information. The company’s brand visibility was developed through improved web presence and more constant messaging. Some participants recognized that the external communications quantity and timing has been problematic from the customer point of view and that there has been a lack of person to person customer contact. However, most of the participants saw it still to be united and available for external stakeholders.

“In general, the external communication has worked quite well, and it has been developed. Though sometimes I’ve received some feedback from the field that the communication about an update or development related to our products has been too little and too late.” (Employee 2, 24.4.2020)

Some participants noted that one of the biggest challenges with regards to communication is that the communication style can be sometimes very sudden. It can also change its course completely and too quickly. This was seen to cause unnecessary consideration and disappointment internally and sometimes also reflects on the external stakeholders.

“In some cases, things can happen quite suddenly and unexpectedly causing one to wonder that “okay, so now this will change and go this way instead”. The same “out of the blue” can then also happen to the customers. Sometimes it’s inevitable but it can end up causing unnecessary disappointments for different parties.” (Employee 2, 24.4.2020)

The brand leadership was seen as active, committed, and providing good examples of work ethics. The leadership style was experienced in different ways. Some participants saw variation and development in it with positive and negative impacts. In general, some unnecessary controlling was seen in certain aspects but in others, the implementation of normative control was found to be an improvement and a necessity. Some participants even saw the leadership style to evolve from restrictive to become more collaborative and

appreciative of one's own ways of thinking. All of the participants indicated that it would be good to receive even more feedback and guidelines even though some stated that it had already been improved to a good level.

The negative perspectives of the brand leadership were related especially to communication. They were concerned with the way that feedback reaches different personnel, the atmosphere which felt sometimes unnecessarily tense, and challenges in understanding what is expected from a person. Also, the credibility was stated to suffer a bit due to the amount of launched initiatives that were declared important and necessary to carry out compared to the amount of them being actually followed through and completed.

“There is a conflict between the communication and leadership style. It's a challenge for the employee to define when one should act the way the company wants the individual to act and when the individual can act the way it's seen to be the best. I cannot really say if it would be better to have more guidelines or should these be just learned through the company's culture and norms. Probably both are necessary.”
(Employee 2, 24.4.2020)

The brand experience varied among the participants. However, in general, the brand experience has been positive for each participant to such an extent that all of them would recommend the company to others. The positive experiences were related to the amount of collaboration between the colleagues, the brand's increased visibility, customer feedback and interaction, and closeness of the community. The leadership's thoughtful and collaborative style, the company's capability to react fast, and the recent years development of a systematic approach to plan before acting were mentioned as positive sides of the company as an employer.

The negative experiences also varied between the participants. The mentioned aspects consisted of the employee's introduction period, uncertainty about resource planification, internal dismissal of the company's products and the way it operates, highlighting of errors and controlling environment, as well as emotional reactions to situations.

“If I think about the brand experience through the perspective of the customers, I could say that we are reliable, collaborative, and a domestically well-known actor who handles everything generally well. As an employer, I've felt that the company has been thoughtful and promotive for better internal collaboration and communication. Sometimes it feels that the environment is a bit controlling when it comes to what can be communicated to who and when.” (Employee 2, 24.4.2020)

Most of the participants felt valued as an employee and proud to work for the company. The pride related to the company's domesticity, positive feedback, the way people show interest, and how they interact and rely on others' expertise on specific matters. New challenges through a new role in the company or the variety of tasks also increased the feeling of being valued. The factors that made participants feel less appreciated was related negative feedback, highlighting of errors, and how the feedback is communicated. The pride of working at the company is slightly diminished due to the generally unknown brand within the participants' social networks.

The brand power was seen to derive from operational quality, specific know-how, and product offering, as well as the personality and closeness within the company. The small company size is seen to enable more person to person interactions, even those that include the leadership of the company. The company's ability to keep its employees on long-term and communicate (especially collect and share of information) is seen as a strength to differentiate the company as an employer.

"The customer experiences that we provide are very good. That goes along as it is not given with all of the companies out there. When we provide good customer experiences consistently and succeed in delivering what is promised, it is already a huge step towards differentiation. It has a big impact on our customers and can at the end significantly affect to the customer's choice and the company's reputation. Fast and accurate deliveries, certainty of supply, product tailoring, listening to the customers, and reacting to their needs comes down to operational quality which is a huge advantage." (Employee 2, 24.4.2020)

Brand support brought up a range of improvement suggestions and deficiencies. Some of the participants saw that the tools to carry out their jobs were outdated or insufficient and felt that the introduction period had felt short and incomplete. Clear guidelines and further training were also hoped for in order to enable repetition and internalization of some of the tasks that are not carried out on a daily basis. The need for further training and guidelines in external communication and customer encounters were also pointed out. On the other hand, some of the participants saw that the guidelines and support to carry out their job were at a good level due to the amount of shared information and available materials.

"The tools in use are rather outdated. The introduction period has been more or less such that whenever there is something new to learn, it requires me to find out about it by myself. If one day I would need to stay alone, it might be hard to handle all of the necessary tasks." (Employee 1, 23.4.2020)

“I would need more support to improve my communication with the external stakeholders when it comes to using different media. I’d like to learn more on how to improve my communication, to make it clearer and some effective techniques and best practices.” (Employee 3, 24.4.2020)

The reward and compensation policy’s positive aspect were rather congruent. They concentrated on one function: the off-work events and trips that the company has organized for all of the personnel in the past. This was seen by some of the participants to improve collaboration and sharing among the colleagues and bring joy to the working culture, resulting in a feeling of unity and helping to promote the company as a united community in front of the external stakeholders. However, some of the participants did not see the off-work events and trips as advancing the business further than just lifting the group spirit internally. Other mentions of reward or compensation policies were rather non-existent and concentrated on monthly salary or personal rewarding systems that were not in place as of yet.

Table 10 summarizes the in-depth employee interviews by category. It lists the positive and negative aspects of each participant either by their repetition or by its divergence.

Table 10. In-depth employee interview’s positive and negative aspects per category

Culture	
+ Customer-oriented + Open, helpful and tight community + Product quality and domesticity + Congruency with personal identity & values	- Introspective - Dismissive behaviourism
Strategic credibility	
+ Reliable and stable company + Goals realistic and achievable	- Low communication of the goals
Communication	
+ Information is gathered and shared + Increased documentation and improved source of information + Brand’s visibility and presence	- Lacks guidelines, repetition and a clear source to refer back to - Correct amount to correct person - Impulsive, fall short in quantity & timing
Brand leadership	
+ Active, committed and high work ethics + Improved normative environment + Increased participation style and the amount of feedback	- Can be too controlling & emotionally affected - More feedback required - Lack of follow up and completion of launched initiatives (/projects)
Brand experience	
+ Positive brand experience; recommends to others + Valued and proud to work in the company + Interaction with colleagues, closeness of the community and thoughtful leadership	- Inadequate introduction period and training - Internal dismissal of operations and products - Controlling environment, highlighting of errors and emotionally directed reactions
Brand power	
+ Operational quality and special know-how + Personality and closeness + Engaged personnel that share information	- Small company with rather unknown brand
Brand support	
+ Available materials, guidelines and support to carry out the job + Off-work events and trips (team spirit)	- Outdated tools and systems - Inadequate introduction period and training - Lack of compensation and rewarding

4.5 Conclusions of present state analysis

The case company's employee's emotional and intellectual buy-in can be said to be strong. According to the author's own observations, the company-wide questionnaire, and in-depth employee interviews, the company's values and core identity is well recognized by the employees and visible in the day to day operations. The corporate identity and values coincide in large part with the employee's own identity and values which strengthens the internationalization of the company's culture and creates the foundation for its authentic status. The case company's culture leans strongly towards customer-orientation and a close community that promotes open communication and sharing. The organizational structure is flat, and the leadership is seen to be rather close and committed to support the culture and deliver the brand promise.

The company's past performance and operational quality has in general created an image among the employees of a reliable and stable employer and actor in the market. The goals and strategy to achieve them are generally seen as realistic and achievable. However, the company-wide questionnaire suggests that the employees do not always feel that the company is able to reach them. In addition, according to the in-depth interviews, the strategic credibility of the company is slightly weakened due to the communication and follow up of the corporate goals. The same issue was implied to be seen also in the number of initiated projects and their completion.

According to the in-depth interview with the CEO and the company-wide questionnaire, the corporate communication was implied to be in need of further development. However, according to the observations and the in-depth employee interviews, the communication was described to have recently gone through important organizational improvements which has developed collaboration, information sharing and documentation. This was backed up by data from the company's internal communication platform. The issues related to internal communication were associated with the lack of guidelines and training. In most of the in-depth interviews, these can be traced back to the recruitment period which was reported to be in several cases rather limited. Also, the communications clarity, repetition, congruency with the external communication, timing and sometimes impulsive characteristics were in some cases seen as problematic.

The company's external communication was described to be on the right path. Improved brand visibility and management was seen as a plus. Also, the observed materials were mainly according to the brand promise, even though some inconsistency was noted in the communication of the company's purpose. The employee's external activity was mainly

described to be by phone, email, and visits while social media presence was relatively low.

The case company's employee brand engagement level is inconsistent. On the positive side, the employee's experience with the company has been positive to the extent that they would recommend the company to others. The company's close community that is seen in general as sharing, supportive of each other, and benefitting from off-work events and trips enhances the positive feeling of belonging to the organization. The leadership is seen rather engaged and active and the overall corporate objectives are understood fairly well.

On the other hand, there seems to be a lack of alignment within the employees when it comes to empowerment, support, and purpose. The absence of internal brand management that consists of brand-oriented communication, -HRM and -leadership reflects all the way from the employee's current behaviour to the recruitment and understanding of the company's purpose and goals. This was highlighted through an inadequate introduction period and training, controlling environment, lack of compensation and reward and support systems and tools, as well as in the communication, follow up and completion of initiatives and company goals.

Figure 22 summarizes the present state analysis. It concludes the negative and positive factors of the employee's emotional and intellectual buy-in and brand engagement as well as demonstrates the implied next steps.

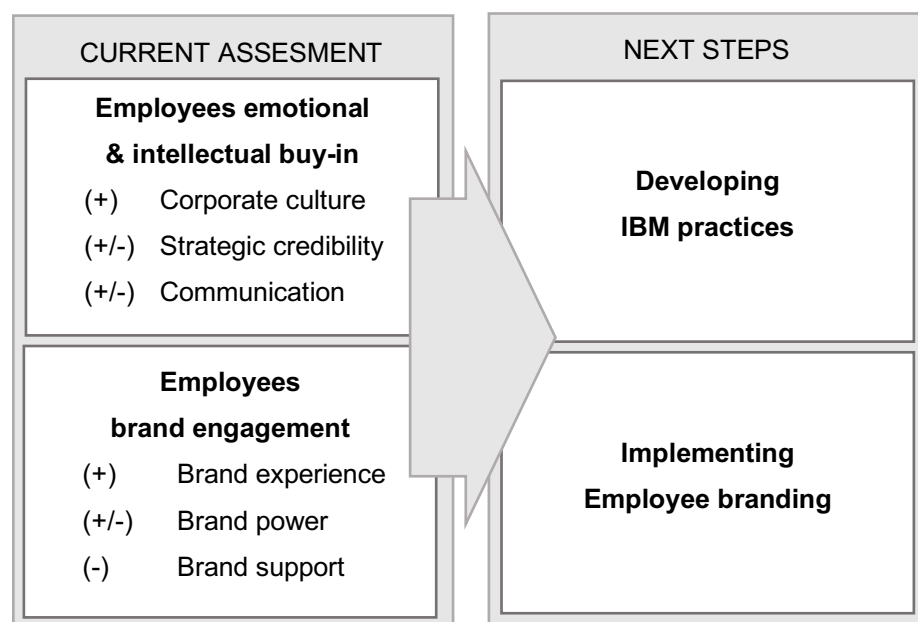


Figure 22. Present state analysis sum up and next steps

5 Implementation

5.1 Development plan

The development plan is based on the theoretical framework and present state analysis of the case company. Its purpose is to create clear steps for the case company to successfully implement an employee branding model. It consists of two phases: developing internal brand management (IBM) practices and developing an employee branding model (figure 23).

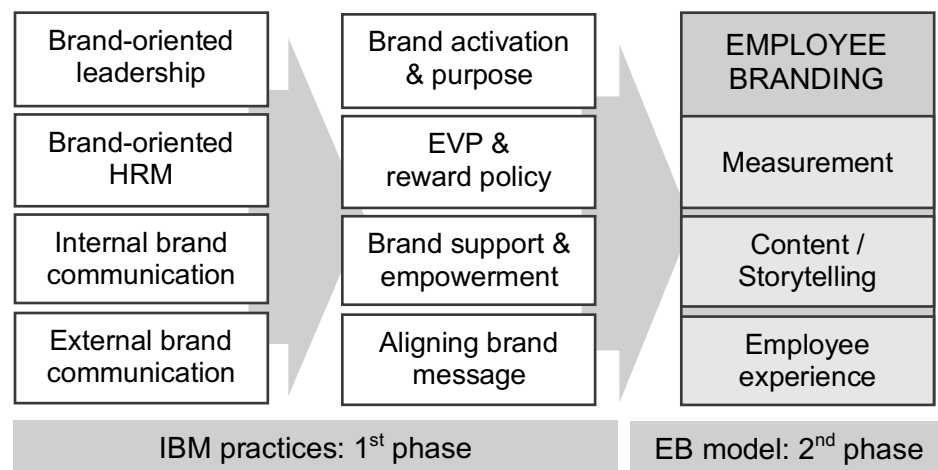


Figure 23. Development process: developing IBM practices (1st phase) that enables the development of employee branding model (2nd phase)

The first phase takes a step towards IBM practices by developing the organizational weaknesses discovered in the present state analysis and enhancing the strengths (table 11). By doing so, the company not only addresses the employees' concerns and feedback (thereby creating positive impact on the psychological contract), but it also creates the foundation for congruent brand management that is essential for positive brand-oriented behavioural outcomes and sustainable employee branding efforts.

The development of the IBM practices starts by creating brand-oriented leadership. Its role and influence are highlighted in all of the managerial IBM practices making it one of the most essential parts of the development. It requires the leadership's (the company's ownership and the CEO) buy-in and full commitment to follow through with the intended implementations as the planned developments overlap and affect almost all of the company's operations. In essence, the employee branding needs to become the company's key branding strategy in order to get the required organizational focus to deliver the company and employee benefits.

Both of the development phases consist of a mix of transactional- (TRL) and transformational (TFL) leadership styles. However, the first phase's emphasis should be on the TRL leadership style in order to create the necessary IBM practices that enable brand supportive behaviour in the first place. On the other hand, the second phase's emphasis needs to be in the TFL leadership style. It allows the employees to identify, commit, and trust the company's purpose through the employee's inherent motivation which is essential for authentic and successful employee branding.

The employees need to be involved since the beginning in order to empower them and to start providing the purpose (the "why") for the behavioural change. Workshops that include the employees in order to characterize the company's and the employee's identity and values empowers them, creates engagement, and helps to further build and define the brand. The workshops aid in determining an employee value proposition (EVP) together with the employees themselves. They also help to build employee buy-in which is crucial for successful employee branding.

Brand-oriented resource management (HRM) needs to be based on the EVP and reward- and compensation policy that supports on-brand behaviour. The on-brand behaviour is determined through the EVP and company's culture. It requires an effective measurement system so that the on-brand behaviour can be encouraged through the reward and compensation policy. By defining the EVP and creating means to support brand citizenship behaviour, the company takes a step closer to creating a unique and compelling package that helps to attract and retain talent (i.e. employer branding).

The internal brand communication activities are focused onto brand support and employee empowerment. It consists of a planned employee training program that enhances the brand values and concentrates on the core of the brand: customer-orientation and operational quality. The employee empowerment needs to be embedded into the training little by little. In practice, it is involving the employees and leaning on their expertise through thought leadership. Encouraging the employees to continue actively using the company's communication platform (Slack) complements the intended activities to create brand support and employee empowerment but also strengthens the platforms position as the centralized information hub for sharing content. The communication platform also works as a tool to measure quantitative and qualitative data on employee engagement and on-brand behaviour.

In general, all internal communication regarding the intended development should avoid, whenever possible, using business terminology such as "branding", "mission", "vision", and "employee engagement". The case company should also avoid forcing the employees

to conduct employee branding. Such terminology and posturing can reduce the employee's authentic behaviour, increase possible resistance to change, and lower the necessary build up for employee buy-in. In essence, concepts that are not common and clear to explain according to the recipient may cause a negative counter reaction and be confusing and counterproductive.

The external brand communications role is to provide support and align the brand appeal. It is essentially branding from the inside out by communicating the company's brand identity, values, and goals to the external stakeholders the same way that they are communicated to the internal stakeholders. Its purpose is to create congruency in corporate communication and employee engagement.

Table 11. Development plan: 1st phase's tasks and their purpose

#	Task	Purpose / Outcome
1	Leadership buy-in and brand activation - Introducing the development plan and benefits - Determining the ownership and schedule	Employee branding as the company's key branding strategy
2	Workshop (all employees involved) - Who are we individually and collectively? - What would we like to be?	Creating brand activation, employee buy-in and grounds for EVP
3	Defining and creating (leadership) - The EVP - Reward- & compensation policy	Builds grounds for brand citizenship behaviour and employee attraction and retention
4	Workshop / training (all employees involved) - Customer-orientation & operational quality - Thought leadership and its benefits	Enforces cascade, central- & lateral communication and brand identification and -commitment
5	Align communication (marketing) - Branding inside out	Aligning the brand message to all stakeholders

The second phase concentrates on developing an employee branding model (table 12). The first step is to determine the key performance indicators (KPI's). The KPIs should be based on employee adaptation, employee participation, and engagement as well as on real business outcomes. They create the basis of verifying the achievement of company goals as well as the employee's on-brand behaviour.

The second step is empowering the employees towards thought leadership. It requires creating examples of content that enhances the projection of the desired image of the company as well as organizing workshops on employee-driven content creation and storytelling. The purpose is to empower the employees to share the desired image of the company and to create the employee's brand engagement through the feeling of being valued within the company as well as by others. At the beginning, the content's form and method of sharing should be according to each employee's preference in order to activate and engage as many employees as possible. Later on, the company's desired method

can be gradually introduced as the company's way of operating. However, it is essential that whichever content the employees are encouraged to create needs to be useful to the people who engage with it as well as relevant for the employees themselves.

The third step includes identifying passionate employees to test the model in practice. The employee-driven content is published in a selected platform in order to collect feedback and make any necessary adjustment. The KPIs need to be enabled when selecting the platform so that the impact of business outcomes of the employee branding model can also be assessed. The fourth and final step is to execute the company-wide launch with the purpose to empower as many employees as possible to become brand citizens who project the desired brand image as widely as possibly.

Table 12. Development plan: 2nd phase's tasks and their purpose

#	Task	Purpose / Outcome
1	Measurement (leadership) - Determining the KPI's; adaptation, participation, engagement & real business outcomes	Tangible (preferably) measurements to verify achievement of goals
2	Content & storytelling (selected employees) - Creating employee-driven content - Enhancing employee storytelling	Thought leadership and employee-driven content for internal (and external) publishing
3	Employee experience (selected employees) - Identifying passionate employees - Selecting and testing the platform to publish employee-driven content	Collecting feedback and adjusting accordingly
4	Company-wide launch - Launching an employee branding model - Constant monitoring and adjusting accordingly	Brand citizens who project the desired brand image as widely as possibly

5.2 Implementation

The development plan's first phase's initial task to create leadership buy-in (table 11, task 1) was carried out as planned by having a preliminary discussion with the CEO in May 2020. The discussion was held to present the study, its findings, and the development plan. It also explained the suggested benefits of the implementation for the case company and to the employees, discussed what the implementation would require from the company, and what should be done next.

After discussion, the CEO supported the implementation of the employee branding model in the case company. The discussions with the CEO also elaborated on ideas to create the necessary employee buy-in by aligning the company's internal communication regarding the current strategic objectives and the study's objective. This resulted in an additional task to the development plan in order to further highlight the necessity to communicate the study's findings to the employees. In addition, during the discussion, it was acknowledged that due to the present state of the case company and the extent of

the development plan, it is essential that the implementation of the employee branding model will be embedded into the company's branding strategy.

In general, the discussion concluded that the implementation can be executed as specified in the development plan. The development plan was expanded into a detailed schedule of the implementation. The schedule was designed as a roadmap which details the execution of each task by month (appendix 7). The roadmap was adjusted to take into account the case company's current plans, resources, and operational situation. It allows the case company to follow up on the planned actions by providing a realistic timeline with precise tasks and deadlines that lead to the implementation of the planned employee branding model.

5.3 Evaluation

The study and the development plan were discussed and evaluated with the CEO in two different meetings in May 2020. The first meeting especially focused on the study's literature review findings and the conclusions of the present state analysis while the second meeting concentrated on the development plan.

The concept of employee branding and the interaction with the other branding concepts and managerial practices were completely new topics for the case company. The theoretical framework was found to be of great value as it can be used to extend the case company's comprehension of the subject and its scope by sharing the findings, for example, with the company's marketing manager. It also shared similarities and enhanced the ideas of the CEO's own recent studies and findings of brand supportive practices.

The conclusions of the present state analysis reinforced some of the CEO's thoughts on the case company's current situation. It also created further value by expanding the discussion and understanding of the interaction and co-dependency of each analysed section to the employee's emotional and intellectual buy-in and engagement.

The meeting regarding the development plan confirmed its practicality. The discussion led to a small change to the original development plan: alignment of the company's current communication of the strategic objectives with the study's objective. The development was added to the roadmap to implement an employee branding model for the case company (appendix 7).

6 Conclusions

6.1 Achieving the objective

The objective of the study was to implement an effective employee branding model for the case company. The study consisted of an extensive literature review and theory development section as well as mixed method research in order to analyse the case company's present state and readiness for implementing an employee branding model. The initial assumption of the study was that the case company's current situation does not allow a direct implementation of an organization wide employee branding model.

The study's objective was not reached as such, as the case company does not currently have an employee branding model in use. However, as per the study's initial assumption, the results of the study confirmed that the present state of the case company does not allow a direct implementation of a consistent and thereby effective employee branding model. This conclusion was the result of two main factors: the overall organizational unpreparedness and the time required for the intended implementation.

The case company's unpreparedness was particularly determined by the lack of internal brand management (IBM) practices and their comprehension. The supportive branding structures that enable coherent employee engagement and brand-oriented behaviour were partly missing. Especially brand support, brand leadership, and internal communication had dissonant aspects and lacked the supportive elements required to create true employee engagement. On the other hand, the company's strong and intimate culture, human-centric values, overall strategic credibility, and leadership engagement and transparency have created a strong basis for the employee's emotional and intellectual buy-in. It has created a positive effect on the employee's brand-oriented behaviour which enables a strong basis for further development of IBM practices.

The time required to make the necessary developments in order to implement an employee branding model was limited. The time constraint issue emerged from the extensiveness of the subject's theoretical framework as well as the study's report submittal schedule. The literature review and the theoretical framework's development emphasized the extent and interact between a successful employee branding and the drivers that support its effective and coherent implementation (figure 24). These motivational factors include, without exception, concepts that aim to affect to the employee's behaviour, feelings, and motivation which makes their development a slow and gradual process.

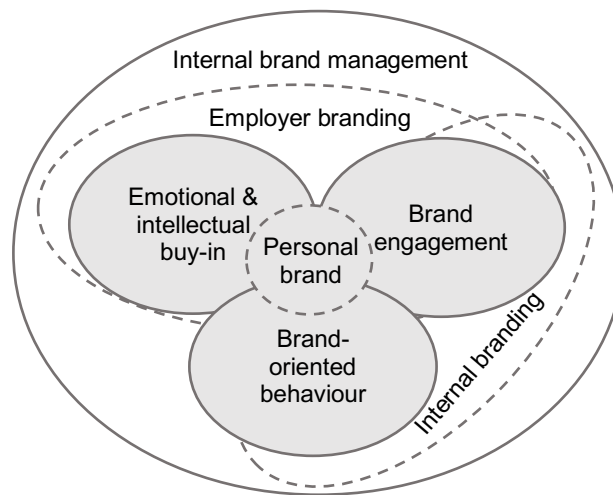


Figure 24. Drivers for employee branding

In addition, the unexpected global crisis of COVID-19 and its effects on the case company's business complicated the objective's achievement. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic overlapped with the study as the first confirmed cases appeared in Finland in late January 2020. The state of emergency continued over the completion of the research process. The pandemic affected the implementation schedule and the case company's commitment as the effects of the pandemic began to have an impact on the case company's day to day business. The effects were manifested as a delay in the implementation process. The pandemic also affected to the selected method of the in-depth interviews as most of them were made remotely by video call or by phone instead of the preferred face-to-face method. However, its effect on the research reliability and validity was negligible.

The study provided comprehensive information of employee branding, the concepts that interact with it, and its implementation into practice. Together with the case company's present state analysis, they created an essential foundation towards the implementation of an effective employee branding model for the case company. It also created organizational value by developing the case company's knowledge and comprehension of brand management and its suggested benefits for business operations. By doing so, the study provided an extensive response to the study's primary and secondary research questions. In addition, the in-depth interviews together with the company-wide questionnaire generated a positive effect on the case company's employees by involving them in discussion which covered a wide spectrum of organizational issues.

The study's value for the case company was enhanced further by the production of a development plan to implement an employee branding model. The development plan was conducted as a roadmap (appendix 7) that sets clear tasks and a schedule for the case

company to develop IBM practices and an effective employee branding model all the way to its company-wide launch. The first steps to start the implementation process were made as far in advance as possible when considering the study's time constraints. According to the discussions with the case company's CEO, the development plan was seen as feasible and valuable for the case company which enables the implementation to continue as planned towards the study's objective.

The study can be considered rather unique by the novelty of the subject. According to Brito (2018, 1), "The idea of getting one's employees, fans, customers, and advocates to say nice things about you is as old as time". However, as companies get lost in endless advertising efforts that mainly create a one-way conversation, and the digitalization and consumer maturity have changed people's behaviour, the comprehension of the importance of inspiring and creating sustainable brand advocates has surged again and brought the novelty back to the subject. For the case company it represented a completely new concept. A concept that can enhance its core competencies and bring value not only for the company and its customers but also for its employees, whose positions have become central for the company.

6.2 Future development ideas

The future development plan for the case company is presented in the roadmap (appendix 7). By continuing the implementation according to the development plan, the case company has the means to implement an effective employee branding model. After the implementation of the employee branding model and its company-wide launch, the internal brand management (IBM) practices that continue the endorsement of brand-oriented behaviour and employee engagement should be strengthened in order to extend the employee branding methods and their effect.

As the completion of the employee branding model's company-wide launch will take time (according to the roadmap, appendix 7), it can be assumed that the situation of the case company and its employees has evolved at least by the implementation of the model if not also by staff turnover and other company operations. Therefore, the recommendation is, that prior to the development of the IBM practices and the incorporation of the extensions to the employee branding model, a modified replica of the study's present state analysis should be made. Its purpose is to assess the current situation of the company, the next most important development areas, and to find out the effects of the recently implemented employee branding model. Its purpose is also to maintain constant communication with the employees and to strengthen employee buy-in.

The replica of the study's present state analysis should include a company-wide questionnaire and employee in-depth interviews together with the established KPIs for the employee branding model. The questionnaire and the in-depth interviews should replicate the study's established models in order to create coherent results and analysis. In addition to the established models, the questionnaire and in-depth interviews should also incorporate a category that concentrates on the recently implemented employee branding model and the employees' thoughts about it.

According to this study's findings, the IBM practices should concentrate on developing brand-oriented leadership and the visibility of the CEO. This would endorse the employee branding model by setting an example by the CEO which could be used to extend the employee branding model to concentrate on employee empowerment to also utilize other means to deliver employee-driven content. It would also strengthen the company's strategic credibility. However, as stated before, these development ideas and their priority should be verified through the conclusions of the new modified present state analysis (figure 25).

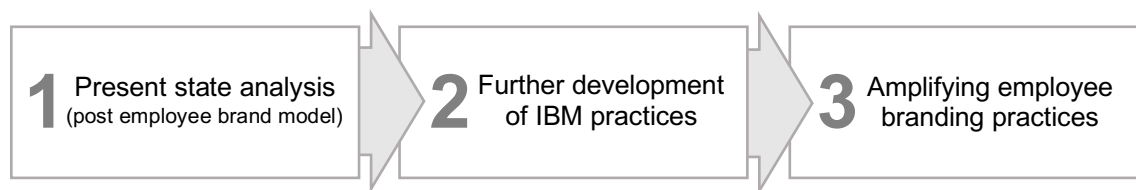


Figure 25. Future development idea by steps

In addition, the author believes that the case company's organizational form and size (family-owned small business) will encourage other small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to seize the opportunity to develop their brands systematically and consider employee branding as one of their key branding strategies. The study and its comprehensive theoretical background provide the necessary theoretical framework and guidelines for its implementation. At the end, it is the SMEs that have the best opportunity to implement employee branding as part of their DNA and to create sustainable differentiation power for their businesses. By starting from the inside out, organizations can realize their full potential and create a win-win situation for all of the stakeholders.

6.3 Reliability and validity

The selection of a research strategy and data collection methods that allowed replication and testing of the consistency of the study's findings increased the study's reliability. The utilized action research strategy and mixed method research design enabled the research to be conducted in such a way that lowered the participants and researcher's errors and

bias. The multiple research cycles created the grounds for gradual organizational learning and interaction between the stakeholders beyond the study while the data collection methods were designed such that the structure of the questionnaire and the in-depth interviews replicated each other. In addition, the use of mixed methods research design enabled a method to be used where the participants were able to provide answers anonymously which lowered the participants and researcher's bias. Together these created parity and consistency for the study.

The mix of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods improved the validity of the results by enabling the findings to be cross-referenced for the accuracy of the analysis. It also enabled generalization of the findings to cover the entire case company. The validity of the measurements to assess the phenomenon was endorsed by the use of an appropriate theoretical framework which extended its frontier beyond brand management's implementation and took into account issues related to people's behaviour, engagement, and experience.

However, the validity of the study's findings to other relevant contexts requires replication of the study in that specific context. The research has been conducted for a specific case company at a specific time with specific people involved. It means that even though the theoretical framework and concepts behind the study are valid and generalizable, the study's findings, which are a combination of the case company's present state analysis and its reflection on the theoretical framework, are only relevant for the case company.

It also needs to be noted that as the author (the researcher) has been working in the case company for many years and therefore has created a strong association with the company, its employees, and owners. As such, the objectivity of the research and analysis may have suffered. However, the author has regarded this bias by implementing various methods in order to reduce its effects as well as making great efforts to maintain objectivity in the research analysis and conclusions.

6.4 Learning process and evaluation

The study had a great impact on the author's understanding of employee branding and its extent and dependency on organizational behaviour, employee experience, and brand management. The author's assumption before the extensive literature review was that the concept of employee branding was underdeveloped and lacked aspects that the author felt important for its success. These aspects included employee-orientation that would allow true employee engagement and authenticity on the employee's projection of the desired brand image. However, after the study's literature review, the author's perception

of the concept deepened and its true nature and scope was revealed. It affected the research process by changing the perspective of the study to be less theory development oriented and focus more on the implementation of the concept.

The literature review and the development of the theoretical framework expanded the author's understanding of employee branding's interaction and strong dependency with organizational behaviour, employee experience, and brand management. The dynamics of the psychological contract between the employee and the organization, organizational culture, values, and purpose, and how these are communicated and organized from the perspective of branding, had a substantial impact on the study's development plan and the implementation of employee branding. In fact, together with the empirical research of the case company's present state analysis, it contributed to the author's and the case company's realization of the necessity to develop the company's supportive structures and managerial processes in order to implement an effective employee branding model.

The study and the achievement of its objective was impacted by the literature review and the full understanding of the scope of employee branding. By further focusing the scope of the study, the actual implementation process could have been more precise and concentrated. It would have allowed the study to provide more focused and clear results on the impacts of employee branding. However, when considering the study's timeline and the case company's present state, as well as the case company's aspiration for the subject, the study was still able to develop the author's and the case company's understanding of the concept and start the implementation with clear steps towards employee branding. Finally, the author was able to learn more about branding and grow as an expert in the specific field of employee branding.

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Attachments

Appendix 1. Employee questionnaire structure (quantitative)

The questionnaire was carried out to all of the case company's employees in their native language. The questionnaire was made by using Google Forms.

PRE-COMMUNICATION TO THE PARTICIPANTS (QUESTIONNAIRES DESCRIPTION)

Tämä kysely on osa maisterin tutkintoa varten tehtävää opinnäytetyötä (Haaga-Helia, YAMK). Kyselyn tarkoituksena on muodostaa kuva yrityksen brändin nykytilasta työntekijöiden perspektiivistä.

Kyselyn kysymykset ovat muodostettu väittäminä, joihin vastataan asteikon mukaan. Asteikon pienin arvo (1) tarkoittaa, että vastaaja on "täysin eri mieltä" ja suurin arvo (5), että vastaaja on "täysin samaa mieltä". Kyselyyn vastataan nimettömästi ja sen arvioitu kesto on n. 5 minuuttia.

QUESTIONNAIRE STRUCTURE

The categories are used for the clarity of the questionnaire but are not mentioned in it.

CATEGORY	QUESTION / CLAIM
IDENTITY / BRAND EXPERIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Kokemukseni yrityksestä on kokonaisuudessaan erittäin positiivinen- Suosittelisin yrityksen tuotteita muille- Olen ylpeä, että työskentelen yrityksessä- Tunnen, että minua arvostetaan työpaikallani
CULTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Minulla on hyvä ymmärrys siitä, miten asiat tulee hoitaa yrityksessä- Minulla on selkeä kuva siitä, mitä minulta odotetaan- Mielestäni yrityksen johto on aktiivinen ja sitoutunut toimintaan
COMMUNI- CATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Yrityksen kommunikaatio on selkeää ja ymmärrettävää- Yrityksen kommunikaatio on yhtenevää niin työntekijöille kuin ulkopuolisille toimijoillekin- Yritys kommunikoi riittävän usein minulle tärkeistä asioista- Minulle on selkeää mikä on yrityksen tarkoitus ja tavoite
CREDIBILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Koen, että yrityksellä on hyvät mahdollisuudet saavuttaa sen asettamat tavoitteet- Yritys saavuttaa asettamansa tavoitteet usein- Mielestäni yrityksellä on hyvä näyttö aikaisemmasta menestyksestä- Koen, että yrityksen johdon kommunikaatio on riittävää ja se kehittää yrityksen mainetta
BRAND POWER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mielestäni yritys erottautuu muista yrityksistä selkeästi- Minulla on hyvä kuva siitä, mitä yritys lupaa tuottaa muille- Yritys herättää minussa vahvan mielikuvan siitä mitä se on
BRAND SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mielestäni saan tarvittavaa tukea, joka auttaa työssäni- Minulle tarjotaan työkaluja ja ohjeistuksia työni suorittamiseen- Yrityksen palkitsemisjärjestelmät tukevat ja motivoivat minua suorittamaan työssäni yli asetettujen odotusten

Appendix 2. Employee questionnaire results (quantitative)

Company-wide questionnaire's questions in original form with the results per question and their average score.

AV.SCORE	CATEGORY	QUESTION / CLAIM
4.3	Brand experience	Suosittelisin yrityksen tuotteita muille
4.3	Brand experience	Olen ylpeä, että työskentelen yrityksessä
4.1	Culture	Mielestäni yrityksen johto on aktiivinen ja sitoutunut toimintaan
4.1	Communication	Minulle on selkeää mikä on yrityksen tarkoitus ja tavoite
4.1	Credibility	Koen, että yrityksellä on hyvät mahdollisuudet saavuttaa sen asettamat tavoitteet
4.1	Credibility	Mielestäni yrityksellä on hyvä näyttö aikaisemmasta menestyksestä
4	Brand power	Yritys herättää minussa vahvan mielikuvan siitä, mitä se on
3.9	Brand power	Minulla on hyvä kuva siitä, mitä yritys lupaa tuottaa muille
3.9	Brand experience	Kokemukseni yrityksestä on kokonaisuudessaan erittäin positiivinen
3.7	Communication	Yritys kommunikoi riittävän usein minulle tärkeistä asioista
3.7	Culture	Minulla on hyvä ymmärrys siitä, miten asiat tulee hoitaa yrityksessä
3.6	Culture	Minulla on selkeä kuva siitä, mitä minulta odotetaan
3.5	Brand experience	Tunnen, että minua arvostetaan työpaikallani
3.5	Brand power	Mielestäni yritys erottautuu muista yrityksistä selkeästi
3.5	Brand support	Minulle tarjotaan työkaluja ja ohjeistuksia työni suorittamiseen
3.4	Brand support	Mielestäni saan tarvittavaa tukea, joka auttaa työssäni
3.4	Credibility	Koen, että yrityksen johdon kommunikaatio on riittävää ja se kehittää yrityksen mainetta
3.4	Credibility	Yritys saavuttaa sen asettamat tavoitteet usein
3.1	Communication	Yrityksen kommunikaatio on selkeää ja ymmärrettävää
3.1	Communication	Yrityksen kommunikaatio on yhtenevää niin työntekijöille kuin ulkopuolisille toimijoillekin
3	Brand support	Yrityksen palkitsemisjärjestelmät tukevat ja motivoivat minua suoriutumaan työssäni yli asetettujen odotusten

Appendix 3. In-depth interview structure (qualitative)

The in-depth interviews were carried out to selected employees (4) and to the CEO. The interviews were face-to-face interviews and are recorded.

PRE-COMMUNICATION WITH THE INTERVIEWEE'S

This interview is a part of a master's thesis that aims to develop the company's branding activities, more precisely employee branding.

The purpose of this interview is to create a comprehensive picture of the company's current situation by understanding how the employees sees and relate to the company's different operations. Its intention is also to find the key elements that should be developed in order to build brand-oriented behaviour that creates benefits for the employees and the brand.

To understand better the company's current situation and the different influential forces that affects to the development of a successful branding processes, the interview is conducted face-to-face as an in-depth interview. The interview is set to last approximately 45 min.

INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

SECTION	QUESTION (H1= main question, H2= supporting question; used if needed)
IDENTITY / BRAND EXPERIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- How would you describe your experience with the company?<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Is it negative or positive? Why?o Would you recommend the company to others?o Are you proud to work with the company?o How is your manager doing for you?o Do you feel valued?
CULTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- How would you describe the company's...?<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Purpose and (values to achieves the) goals?b) Identity? <i>What individuals feel and think of the company (what is unique, important, distinctive) and how these beliefs are shared among its members. Defines who (organization) they are, what is their main business and what they want to be.</i>c) Culture? <i>Collective beliefs of the company's members (subset to identity). Sets up; norms, guidelines and expected behaviour. Physical level (how is it viewed by external stakeholders), values of the key personnel and how company is managed, and members behaviour.</i>d) Brand promise?- How would you describe your own...?<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Purpose and goals? Values? Brand?b) Do you feel they are similar to the company's ones?
COMMUNI- CATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- How would you describe the company's communication?<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Is the timing, consistency, media and targeted audience appropriate? <i>e.g. sharing of company's strategic vision with key stakeholders</i>o Is it consistent with the brand promise?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is it consistent and integrated with the brand activities? <i>i.e. as an employer (for current employees and new recruits), as a supplier for the external stakeholders (ads, web presence, corporate literature, etc.), internally</i> ○ How would you describe informal and formal communication? ○ Are internal and external communication aligned? ○ Do you feel that the company's messages are understandable, clear, spread through appropriate medias, and they motivate or inspire you? <i>Different internal audiences and possible generational differences</i>
CREDIBILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you describe the company's strategic capabilities? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategic capability? <i>How favourable key stakeholders see the company's overall strategic capabilities; how well do they achieve the objectives</i> ○ Past performance? <i>Financial background, improved market position, achieved growth</i> ○ Credibility of the CEO? <i>How does the CEO communicate with the stakeholders? How is the tone? Does it affect to the company's overall reputation?</i>
BRAND POWER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you think makes the company different from the others? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does the brand provoke any emotional response?
BRAND LEADERSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you describe the leadership to be? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How engaged do you see the leadership (active/passive/visible)? ○ Does the leadership provide you feedback? If yes, what kind of? ○ How would you describe the leadership style? - How would you describe the company's brand management? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Where does it extent or limit and what does it currently consist? ○ Does it reflect back to the company's ideology, leadership, HRM, communication, internal brand communities?
BRAND SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does the company support you to represent the brand (if any)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does it provide any tools and guidelines and is it active? <i>e.g. trainings, constant communication on "how to" or similar</i> ○ Do they help in your specific job description? ○ Are there any prevailing norms, rules or restrictions? - How would you describe the company's compensation policies and practices? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are they supporting behaviour that is on-brand? ○ Do they enable growth and continuity of the desired behaviour?
EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOUR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you interact with the external stakeholders? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What ways of communication do you use or would like to use? <i>i.e. phone, email, face-to-face, social media platforms, company's web sites, job boards, personal and professional networks, reviews etc.</i> ○ Do you communicate with them off work? ○ Are there any internal brand communities? Are external stakeholders invited participate into them? - How do you talk about the company to your social contacts? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ As an employer / a provider of the goods its selling / a brand? - What would encourage you to talk about the company to your social contacts? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Would it need some specific change or support from the company?
EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOUR (Only for CEO interview)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you describe the employees' brand behaviour? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is it active / passive? ○ Are the employee's values congruent with the brand values? ○ Do the employees generate positive brand value? ○ Are the employees complying, identifying and committed to the brand? ○ Does any of the employee's behaviour go beyond the organization's expectations? - How would you describe the employees brand engagement level? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are the employees enabled to feel that they belong to something bigger than their everyday job suggests? Do the environmental and experiential aspects support it?

Appendix 4. Managerial IBM practices

MANAGERIAL IBM PRACTICES	
Brand-oriented leadership	Brand-oriented HRM
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Specify behavioural standards for employee's role as brand representatives and reward them when expectations are met 2. Clarify what constitutes as undesired behaviour as a brand representative and punish employees for not following the specified standards. 3. Act as a role model and live the brand 4. Articulate the brand vision and arouse employees' involvement and pride in the brand 5. Support employees to interpret the brand promise and its implications for their daily work 6. Teach and coach employees to become brand representatives 7. Share brand-related information and use employees' information and input in making brand-related decisions 8. Delegate authority and encourage employees' self-directed decisions as brand representative 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use the brand identity as a basis for employer marketing and selection in the anticipatory socialization stage through communication of the brand identity in job advertisements and job interviews and through consideration of congruency between personal identity and brand identity as selection criterion 2. Apply brand-oriented orientation, training, and events in the encounter stage 3. Employ brand-oriented training, events, coaching, and mentoring and install brand-oriented bonus systems, as well as brand-oriented evaluation, promotion, and dismissal criteria in the metamorphosis stage
Internal brand communication	External brand communication
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Segment employees based on their tenure, hierarchical or departmental position, geographical location, relevance to product and service production or delivery, demographic and psychographic criteria, or type and frequency of customer interactions 2. Follow an integrated communication approach by aligning all communication tools in their message content, form, and timing 3. Apply multidirectional communication by complementing top-down communication with bottom-up forms 4. Employ interactive, two-way communication (e.g. brand workshops) and personal communication (e.g. face-to-face conversation) to successfully communicate usually rather abstract brand identities and promises 5. Ensure a high quality of communication through accuracy, timeliness, usefulness, completeness, and credibility of the information 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. External brand communication is characterized by a high quantity and quality that does not make exaggerated brand promises that employees cannot fulfil 2. The culture and values of the organization are portrayed accurately in external brand communication 3. Employees are portrayed accurately in external brand communication (e.g. by using actual employees) 4. External brand communication is aligned with internal brand communication to avoid employee confusion and negative effects on IBM outcomes

Appendix 5. Corporate communication in web

Removed content from published version.

Two pictures of the Company X's website with the company's own description about itself on "about us" -page as well as in the main page.

Available: [https://\[Company X\].com](https://[Company X].com)

Accessed: 16.4.2020

Removed content from published version.

Two pictures of the Company X's Instagram account that showed the brand image through promotional pictures and the company's description about itself.

Available: [https://www.instagram.com/\[Company X\]/](https://www.instagram.com/[Company X]/)

Accessed: 16.4.2020

Removed content from published version.

Two pictures of the Company X's Facebook and Pinterest accounts that showed the brand image through promotional pictures and the company's description about itself.

Available: [https://www.facebook.com/\[Company X\]/](https://www.facebook.com/[Company X]/)

[https://fi.pinterest.com/\[Company X\]/](https://fi.pinterest.com/[Company X]/)

Accessed: 16.4.2020

Appendix 6. Employee interaction in internal communication channel

Internal communication channel: Slack (Internal business communication platform)

Data source & date accessed: Case company's accounts Slack Analytics
(analysed from comma separated excel file).
Accessed: 14.4.2020

1.1.2020 – 31.3.2020	January	February	March
Members (internal stakeholders)	12	12	12
Non-members (external stakeholders)	2	2	2
Total members	14	14	14
Daily active members (average)	9,9 (71%)	9,6 (69%)	10,1 (72%)
Daily posting messages (average)	6,4 (46%)	6,6 (47%)	6,4 (46%)
Weekly active members (average)	13,3 (95%)	13,2 (94%)	12,7 (91%)
Weekly posting messages (average)	12,1 (86%)	12,3 (88%)	11,1 (79%)
Messages	959	1005	1452
Messages growth per month in %	-	+5%	+44%
Messages per business day (22 days/month)	44,6	45,7	66
% of message in public channel (average)	39 %	40 %	34 %
% of message in direct message (average)	63 %	62 %	67 %

Explanations

Active member: Refers to the number of members (excluding bots) who read a public channel in the last 7 days.

Members who posted: Refers to the number of members (excluding bots) who posted at least one message in the last 7 days

Available: <https://slack.com/intl/en-fi/help/articles/218407447-View-your-Slack-analytics-dashboard#free,-standard,-and-plus-plans-3>. Accessed: 16.4.2020

Appendix 7. Roadmap to implement employee branding for the case company

PHASE	TASK	2020												2021			
		May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr				
Developing IBM practices	Completed study & development plan Leadership buy-in: employee branding as the key branding strategy Employee buy-in (grounds): presenting the study's findings Workshop: brand activation & employee buy-in Defining & creating: EVP & reward & compensation policy Aligning internal & external communication	✓				*											
		✓															
Implementing Employee branding	Workshop: core competence & thought leadership Defining the measurements (KPI's) Creating employee-driven content & storytelling Testing the model, collecting feedback & making adjustments Companywide launch																

*Decision to include employee branding as key branding strategy from 2021 onwards

*Decision to include employee branding as key branding strategy from 2021 onwards